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A PRELIMINARY CONTRIBUTION TO AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE USE OF
PLAYFULNESS IN FAMILY THERAPY

A Dissertation Presented

By

NORMAN HENRIK CHRISTIANSEN

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 1985

Education

NORMAN HENRIK CHRISTIANSEN

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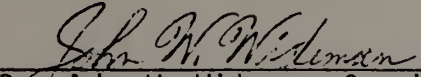
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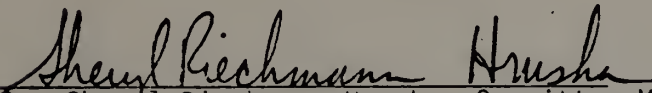
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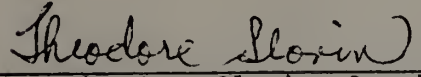
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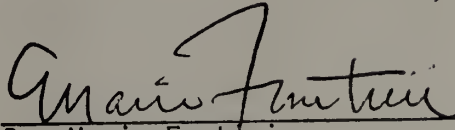
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ABSTRACT

A Preliminary Contribution to an Understanding of the Use of Playfulness in Family Therapy

(March 1985)

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Directed by: Dr. John W. Wideman

This research project endeavored to formulate notions about playfulness to fill a theoretical gap in our understanding of playfulness by exploring its present utilization with six expert informants (practicing family therapists) and synthesize their ideas, uses and advances to make some statements about its usefulness in the family therapeutic process.

Six family therapists were interviewed during the fall of 1983 and the spring of 1984. In the summer of 1984, we met together in a seminar to discuss the impact of our interview on their work, to agree upon a definition of playfulness, and to discuss our findings with regard to the effect of playfulness on their work as family therapists.

The interview method elicited more data regarding the use of playfulness in the family therapy of these expert informants than anticipated. It increased the family therapists' awareness of it, their efforts to utilize it, and their thinking about its contributions to the process of therapeutic change.

This qualitative research project utilized the principles of

constant comparative analysis specific to methods of grounded research.

Forms of playfulness identified in this study were humor, word play, paradox, absurdity, irony, nicknames, allegories and metaphors. The therapists interviewed identified some generalizations regarding when being playful and why being playful might be helpful in family therapy.

The interviewees agreed that being playful was not necessary in situations where a family is talking about serious concerns and is not using any emotion in ways that prevent them from solving problems.

This project presented behavioral observations of the impact of playfulness on the family, and discussed ideas regarding the interaction of playfulness with the process of therapeutic change.

Playful interventions are intended to affect change by cutting through dysfunctional family reality models, by reversing ideas which disrupt interactions and by taking a whimsical, lighthearted view of the human dilemma. Playfulness sets the tone for the flexible environment which engenders change.

The final chapter contains implications for the theory, practice and training of family therapy.

Playfulness seemed to contribute to the process of this research and can be seen as truly systemic!

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Background of the Problem

There are times in therapy when there is a sudden shift in a family's attitudinal set. During these moments their perception of what is happening in their lives is positively different! They've changed! They seem to have a lighter view of themselves, sometimes joking and laughing at situations that previously seemed so serious and at problems that were almost insurmountable. Their interactions with each other are without the intense frustration or anger which plagued and weighted them down for so long. The family seems happier, more joyful, flexible, spontaneous and playful. They seem to have a restored faith in themselves that they will get through these difficulties, almost as if to say "we feel healthy again". Sometimes these events are so startling that we wonder what precipitated them and prompted the sudden attitudinal shifts. One might ask if something was said that encouraged the family to adopt a lighter more positive playful attitudinal frame of reference. Can we as therapists more deliberately engender these changes?

These types of changes occur frequently in the Family Therapy process. Watzlawick (1974) says that we usually think of them as uncontrollable, incomprehensible, a quantum jump, a sudden illumination which unpredictably comes at the end of a long, often frustrating,

mental and emotional labor, sometimes in a dream and sometimes almost as an act of grace in the theological sense. But he adds that this type of change is unpredictable, abrupt and illogical only in terms of viewing it from within the system. Seen from outside the system, it merely amounts to a change of the premises (the combination of rules in terms of group theory) governing the system as a whole. And so the question arises, how do we change the premises of the system? What is the relationship of these changes to playfulness?

Understanding change in the therapeutic context has received much attention in the field of family therapy. Haley (1971, 1976, Palazzoli (1978), Watzlawick (1974), Madanes (1981), Andolphi (1979) and Minuchin (1976, 1980) have written extensively on the subject of change and have consequently developed ideas and methods of encouraging change through the family therapeutic process. One interesting idea which has not received widespread attention is the idea of using playfulness in the therapeutic context. Playfulness, as a tool in the educational process, has long been viewed as valuable (Lieberman, 1977) but the field of therapy has utilized this primarily with children. In the field of Family Therapy playfulness has only been touched upon and the majority of the literature addresses the use of play as a process for including children more effectively into the therapy. Andolphi (1979) contends that play facilitates the participation of children in Family Therapy and proposes using play to join a family, to gather information about the family's interactions and to restructure the family's interaction. His first two uses are clearly aimed at the inclusion of children al-

though he does say that it also relaxes the adults. In restructuring the family's interaction through play he establishes a game with new rules that require new interactions thus establishing different, more appropriate structures for the family. They may also see the absurdity of some problematic behaviors when engaged in a game that exaggerates these repetitive behavioral difficulties. Throughout his writing he does not address how he introduces play into the session and implies that he simply says, "I want to play this game". While this may be an effective method of introducing play, playfulness on the part of the therapist may be a means of preparing the family for the appropriate attitude which is conducive for play and ultimately change. In this way playfulness itself can be seen as an intervention.

Madanes (1981) presents the idea of pretending as a way to introduce an intervention. The family is requested to pretend to act in certain ways in order to perform a task or follow a direction. Jay Haley, in the forward to Madanes' book states that

"one of the merits of pretending is that it fits within a tradition of play in therapy. When people are irrationally grim, the introduction of playfulness can introduce new behavior and bring about new alternatives. The reader should not underestimate the powerful influence of play and pretending. Such interventions can appear deceptively light if one does not understand that reclassifying human behavior is a powerful means of change".

All play is not accompanied by a playful attitude and in this study it is the issue of playfulness that is being considered. When the therapist is playful he introduces the family to a different affective response while they are still involved in the same set of circumstances. Playfulness may lead to humorous responses. It can break the normal set

of expectations of the family and create a more positive, pleasurable and hopeful mood. Once the set is broken there can be an expansion of meanings for the situation and the idea of alternatives becomes a reality once again. One alternative can lead to another and the family can be freed from its locked-in repetitive, ineffective pattern of responding. The positiveness of playfulness can release the creative abilities to problem solve and get back on the track of their family life development.

Statement of the Problem

This identifies the transformational nature of playfulness which can encourage and engender change. However, there is a paucity of research about playfulness in the Family Therapy literature. In fact, after an exhaustive review of the National Center for Mental Health, National Center for Family Research Psychological Abstract, and Educational Resources Information Center literature there is but one direct mention of playfulness in Family Therapy. So we have to glean most of our present understanding from implications that theoreticians have presented about how they conduct their family therapy. Definitions about playfulness remain unclear and difficult to identify precisely. Hence we do not understand the therapeutic value of playfulness and how best to utilize it so that we can be more helpful to families.

Purpose of the Research Project

The purpose of this project is to formulate some notions about playfulness, to fill a gap in our theoretical understanding of playfulness by exploring its present utilization with expert informants (practicing family therapists) and synthesize their ideas, uses, and advances and to make some statements about its usefulness in the family therapeutic process.

Significance of the Research Project

- 1) If we explore playfulness in the family therapeutic context we may learn how to use playfulness to bring about therapeutic changes with families more deliberately and more easily.
- 2) By exploring playfulness in the family therapeutic context and learning ways to apply it might have an impact on how we think about the theory and practice of family therapy.
- 3) By focusing directly on playfulness in family therapy, which has not been done, a working definition can be developed which can be used to promote further attention and research to this topic.

Limitations

This is a research project designed to explore, define and illustrate some notions about playfulness and its application to family ther-

apy. It is not the intention of this research project to prove the usefulness of playfulness in any quantifiable way.

CHAPTER II

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Do we dare to be playful in such a serious endeavor as family therapy? Can such an idea have a sound theoretical basis and demonstrate positive practical results?

This review of the literature is presented to inform the reader of relevant research pertaining to playfulness and its use in family therapy. Since there is a paucity of research in this area, the use of playfulness in other forms of therapy is provided to aid in the building of a rationale gleaned from former research. While it seems so natural to this author for playfulness to be an integral part of family therapy, there is basically one article which specifically identifies playfulness and describes its implementation. Four major research data bases were investigated: Psychological Abstracts; National Center for Mental Health; National Center for Family Research; and Educational Resources Information Center.

Playfulness and Family Therapy

Most of the literature in family therapy discusses play techniques in working with families. This area has primarily followed the path that child therapy took. This theoretical position basically reasons that integrating play with family treatment provides an activity which is the child's natural medium for self expression, that it reflects a child's relationship to the outer world as well as to the inner one.

Specific play forms have been developed to help families cut through intellectualization, defensiveness and projection of blame but there is no identification of playfulness in designing these forms of play or implementing them. Andolphi (1979) talks about using play for the child's benefit but also to relax the parents. He also describes diagnostic uses of observing family interactions during a play activity and designing specific games to help couples make role reversals and view their behavior from another metalevel. Yet he does not mention playfulness.

Other forms of play such as Family Sculpturing (Papp, Silverstein and Carter (1977)), Art-Family Mural Painting (Bing (1970) and (Rubin and Magnesen (1974))), and the Family Puppet Interview (Irwin and Mallor (1975)) have all been implemented at various times by this author. Playfulness sometimes emerged as a resulting attitude of the implementation of these play forms. As important, however, it was found that the use of playfulness, by this therapist, when introducing these techniques relaxed the participants and enriched their interactions. Playfulness seems to increase spontaneity within the family thereby loosening rigid attitude boundaries. This leads to more flexibility and opens them to new learning, new frames of reference for viewing their problems and ultimately new ways of interacting.

In family therapy there are several techniques which are not identified as play or as being playful but certainly deserve some consideration here. Positive reframing or relabeling creates a way to release clients from self definitions that they have previously assigned to the

meaning of their behavior. It can loosen their grip on anger, frustration or resentment which are often felt when negative connotations are assigned as motivations for behavior. Weeks and L'Abate (1982) report that relabeling requires that both the therapist and the client begin to think dialectically about the problem behavior. This produces space and mobility. Watzlawick (1974) refers to reframing as a "gentle art" which can be viewed as a form of playfulness capable of releasing the client from rigid intellectual frameworks.

Paradoxical directives may also fit comfortably into the concepts of playfulness. In the foreward to Madanes' book, Haley comments that most paradoxical techniques tend to be confrontations and depend on the clients rebelling against the definition of the relationship implied in the directive (Haley, 1981, p. xiv). Madanes' 1981 technique of pretending is also a paradoxical technique but is not confrontational and does not depend on rebellious responses. One can ask a family to pretend to respond in distressing ways without the directive being one that disturbs the helpful relationship. Pretending can be seen as playful, and Haley (1981) adds that the introduction of playfulness can introduce new behavior and bring about new alternatives.

In the one article that specifically identifies playfulness Williamson (1982) suggests that playfulness is an effective intervention into the intense emotionality of intergenerational work. It transforms and transcends the otherwise dominating consciousness of one polarity. In his article he suggests frameworks for playful interventions which possess some or all of the following characteristics: they exaggerate,

confuse, surprise, introduce new ideas, mix words and pronunciations and draw phrases from popular songs that reflect a family's specific story. He adds that these interventions help the therapist keep the distance necessary to view a family from outside the system and to diffuse the intense emotionality of issues. For the client (but perhaps also for the therapist) playfulness induces a confusion in the cognitive structures which releases personal creativity.

Whittaker (1975) discusses the use of absurdity in what seems to be a playful manner. Absurdity pushes paradox into a fully circular pattern of logical (or illogical) thought. Rather than simply inducing confusion, the effect is a radical dissolution of the rationality supporting a particular cognitive posture. Williamson (1982) adds to this idea that absurdity takes a whimsical view of the human experience, informed by a comparison born of identification. Whittaker (1976) later writes, "when we try to act reasonably, we deny our personhood . . . as we struggle to 'be' who we are, it is impossible to stop acting . . . we are both tragic and farcical. This Janus mask is thus our absurdity" (p.10). In a more recent article Whittaker (1981) makes explicit that absurdity can be used to overcome rigid family situations. When confronted with a family that included a daughter who was the anti-therapy faction in the family and who was complaining about feeling bored, the therapist went over and sat on her lap. The interview continued. The therapist asked the mother if she felt helpless about father's drinking. The daughter who was sitting stiffly said, "I really do wish you'd get off my lap". The therapist did not move but said, "It's all right. If you

get an erection, I'll take the blame". (P. 251).

When the therapist takes a playful stance with families he/she seems to be in an advantageous position of distance to view the system's interactions more effectively, to intervene and engage the family in a process of interaction which moves the family to a higher level of abstraction from which to view themselves. In an article, regarding the therapist's personal authority, Conger (1979) addresses the Italian Renaissance concept of *Sprezzatura* (the ability to be comfortable, at home, playful and graceful while doing difficult tasks) and its applicability to family therapy. This seems to be directed toward helping the therapist avoid becoming a part of the dysfunctional family system.

Playfulness in Other Therapeutic Mileus

In separate articles, Tiesman (1979) in working with couples, Malamud (1980) and Crocker (1975) in working with groups, suggest that playfulness enhances the likelihood of problem resolution. They do not explain how this phenomenon works but suggest that it is useful.

Throughout the literature on playfulness in therapy no one offers a clear definition for playfulness. Some characteristics have been identified but these are not very useful.

The effects or results of playfulness have been discussed or inferred and the clearest account of this comes from Boorstein (1980) who works primarily with individuals and has a mixed orientation of psychoanalytic ideas and humanistic values. In his article he mentions playfulness once as an alternative word for lightheartedness. He explains

changes in behavior as resulting from interventions that may not be particularly humorous but which often directly conflict with a person's established and traditional belief system, and is startling enough to produce laughter and the concomitant reduction of tension.

The range of research which identifies the use of playfulness in therapy and particularly the use of playfulness by major family therapy theorists has been presented. This idea has not received the attention which this author expected to find. Despite the lack of research in this area, there seems to be some identification of its importance, and maybe more significant, there may be a wider utilization than has been specifically identified. Some techniques which therapists employ may not presently be considered playful yet with some careful examination it may very well be that certain aspects of their styles, specific interventions and situations actually elicit playful behavior from the therapist. In turn with careful observation it may be that these styles, techniques and interventions are extremely helpful to families. Perhaps heightened awareness of playfulness in their work will have an impact on their work.

C H A P T E R I I I
M E T H O D O L O G Y
I N T R O D U C T I O N T O T H E G R O U N D E D T H E O R Y M E T H O D

The methodology to be used in this Research Project is founded in the work by Glaser & Strauss (1967). The term used to describe this type of research is "grounded theory", which is theory derived from data and which is illustrated by characteristic examples of data. Generating a theory from data means that most hypothesis and concepts not only come from the data, but are systemically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 1).

As a general strategy the grounded theory methodology requires comparative analysis for developing new theoretical concepts and hypothesis.

This is a particularly appropriate approach for this project since there are only inferences to playfulness in the research literature and it is therefore a new area for research.

The grounded theory method begins with a general problem area rather than with preconceived theories that need to be verified. The researcher usually begins the research with a partial framework of concepts which are referred to as local concepts which identify some of the principal features of the structures and/or processes to be studied (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 45).

Selecting Comparison Groups

Determining who should be selected for the comparative analysis is done with one major point in mind:

a) Do the subjects to be compared have theoretical relevance for furthering the development of emerging categories. The researcher selects groups "that will help generate to the fullest extent, as many properties of the categories as possible and that will help relate categories to each other and to their properties (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, 49). This type of sample is referred to as Theoretical Sampling, which allows the flexibility necessary to insure the data's relevance to the emerging theory.

The Constant Comparative Method

Glaser & Strauss (1967) identify four stages in the constant comparative method: "1) comparing incidents applicable to each category, 2) integrating categories and their properties, 3) delimiting the theory and 4) writing the theory. (105)".

1) Comparing incidents applicable to each category - The analyst starts by coding each incident in his data into as many categories of analysis as necessary. As data flows into each category predominant categories emerge. While coding an incident for a category one compares it with the previous incidents coded in the same category. The constant comparison of the incidents very soon starts to generate theoretical properties of the category. Key to developing categories is constant coding of data into as many units of analysis as possible, to delineate the differences and similarities among the processes observed and the

continuous comparison with data that has already been coded and categorized.

2) Integrating categories and their properties - The constant comparison of incident to incident causes the accumulated knowledge pertaining to a property of the category to evolve. Category and property are concepts indicated by the data itself. Both vary in degree of conceptual abstraction. "A category stands by itself as a conceptual element of the theory. (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, 36).

3) Delimiting the theory - The theory develops through the constant comparative method of data collection and analysis. Since there can be an overwhelming amount of data collected it is imperative that a delimiting process be instituted. This occurs on two levels, the theory and the categories. As categories and their properties become clearer the theory begins to emerge. The constant comparisons force the researcher to consider his data from incident to incident and in relation to the properties of a category, i.e. similarities and differences. This results in the creation of a "developmental" theory. The constant comparison facilitates the generation of theories of process, sequence and change pertaining to organizations positions and social interaction. (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, 114). Another way of presenting this theoretical emergence is referred to as discussional theory. This is considered to be sufficiently useful at the exploratory stage of research.

The need to modify categories or their properties decreases and so relevant data is quickly assimilated and irrelevant data reduced. A relevant category is one that is delimited from the original list of categories according to the boundaries of the theory. Categories also

become theoretically saturated. After an analyst has coded incident for the same category a number of times, he learns to see quickly whether or not the next applicable incident points to a new dimension. If yes, then the incident is coded and compared. If no, the incident is not coded, since it only adds bulk to the coded data and nothing to the theory.

4) Writing theory - When the researcher is convinced that his analytic framework is a reasonably accurate statement of the matters studied and that it is couched in a form that others going into the same field could use, then it is time to write the theory.

Research Design

A qualitative research project is proposed to develop an understanding of the use of Playfulness in Family therapy. The research design will utilize the principals of constant comparative analysis specific to methods of grounded theory. Interviews, questionnaires and seminar-workshop will gather data, while an ongoing process of comparative categorization of the data contributes to the emergence of the theory. These two processes will occur interactively and simultaneously.

Groups of Comparison

Six family therapists will be selected according to the following theoretically relevant criteria:

- 1) The therapist is presently a practicing family therapist
- 2) Plans to be practicing family therapy for the next 12 months
- 3) Has practiced family therapy for at least 3 years prior to

this research

- 4) Possess a minimum of a Master's degree in family therapy or some related and/or relevant field of human study.

Variation among subject therapists is often encouraged in grounded theory research to enrich and advance theory development.

Beginning Conceptual Framework of the Study

"Playfulness" will be studied in the context of family therapy. The conceptualization of the family therapy context for this study is taken from Haley's Problem Solving Therapy (1976).

"Problem solving family therapy is a therapeutic procedure that emphasizes the therapist's role in formulating presenting symptoms and designing intervention strategies in the client's social situation in order to change the presenting symptom."

Local concepts which reflect principal features of the research area and offer beginning direction for the collection of data will be presented for "playfulness".

Playfulness

Preliminary properties of this conceptual category will provide direction for this research. As questionnaires are completed, interviews conducted and the seminar presented, additional properties will emerge, be coded and added to this category so it may be further clarified, illustrated and discussed. The following properties are offered as initial dimensions of playfulness: It may be humorous, ironic,

whimsical or pleasurable. It has a transformational capability that can create sudden affective shifts, introduce positive affect and upset expectations of seriousness or doom. It implies a different frame of reference, a different attitude towards content and invites different actions, attitudes and assumptions.

Methodology

Two methods of qualitative data collection will be used in this research project. Each therapist will receive a questionnaire which is designed to initiate his/her thoughts regarding the issue of playfulness and its applicability to Problem Solving Family Therapy (See Appendix 3). By focusing their attention to the issue we hope to prepare them for the first method of data collection.

The first method is an interview with each therapist. This will be conducted after the therapist has received and completed the questionnaire. The general format of this interview will follow the outline provided in Appendix C. This method of obtaining data is appropriate for this type of research since it allows the researcher to explore areas of relevancy as they emerge through the interview and as the research project progresses. Each interview will be a conversation guided by the local concepts of playfulness in the context of family therapy.

The second method of data collection will occur through a seminar after all the interviews are completed. This will include all the therapists and be organized according "to the dictates of the data". The intent of the seminar is to provide the interviewees with feedback from

the interviews and to explore to what extent, if any, their work has been influenced by playfulness. Case studies will be a relevant source of data to be examined. The researcher will carry out the following schedule of contacts with each therapist:

1. Initial Phone Call (Appendix A) - will be made to family therapists who are presently practicing and with whom this author is familiar.
2. Letter to Research Subjects (Appendix B) - will be sent to each therapist following their agreement to participate and an appointment set for the interview.
3. Questionnaire - (Appendix B) - To accompany Letter to Research Subjects providing them with a process for focusing their ideas and experiences with playfulness in their work as family therapists.
4. Interview (Appendix C) - Each therapist will be interviewed for 1 - 2 hours regarding playfulness and its usefulness in family therapy. The purposes of the interview are:
 - a. Gather biographical information about the therapist.
 - b. Establish rapport.
 - c. Evoke ideas and experiences about playfulness in their work as family therapists.
 - d. Collect data regarding their ideas and experiences with playfulness and family therapy.
 - e. Elicit a spontaneous interaction which will generate relevant areas not anticipated.

This process will help the researcher identify and develop appropriate conceptual categories for coding and analyzing data.

5. Follow-up Seminar (Appendix E) - Will include all the therapists who participated in the research project. The purposes of the seminar are:
 - a. To provide the therapists with a synthesis of the findings from the interviewees which represents a consensus of their ideas.
 - b. To provide an interactional focus for the sharing and building together of ideas regarding playfulness and their work as family therapist.
 - c. Since making playfulness explicit through the questionnaires and interviews, how has this effected their use of it in their work as family therapists?

Time Frame of Research Project

Data collections will take place from August - December, 1983.

Data Recording and Coding

The researcher will keep written records of data collected so that it can be utilized to develop conceptual categories. This method of conjoint data collection and conceptual theorization is specific to the research method of grounded theory and is considered crucial to theory generation.

1. Each interview will be audio tape recorded to obtain verbatim records of data collected. Permission to tape and keep notes during the interview will be obtained from each therapist prior to the interviews.
2. Note taking will accompany the audio taping throughout the interviews to record immediate responses of the researcher to be addressed later, to record impressions, non verbal responses and capture the researcher's spontaneous reaction of emerging categories.
3. Case studies and specific incidents which a therapist identifies as relevant to the topic will be written out more explicitly immediately following each interview. This will minimize the forgetting of specific relevancies and maximize the appropriate pertinence of each therapist's ideas.

Categories

There are two sets of categories which will be part of this research project:

- a. Anticipatory - these categories are the author's ideas about how playfulness is involved in family therapy and are also gathered from literature which has relevancy to this project.
- b. Emergent - gathered from the research data.

Analysis of Data

Analysis of Data will be continuous as each bit of data is obtained it will be coded according to its relevance to anticipatory categories

or as it develops an emerging category. The integration of all research activities is specifically important to grounded research theory. As data is collected and analyzed new and/or additional information may be necessary to obtain. If this occurs it will be integrated into the same processes of theoretical sampling, collection, coding and analyzing.

Summary

A qualitative research study is proposed, using the method of constant comparative analysis to develop some notions about playfulness and its usefulness in the family therapeutic context. Six family therapists will be chosen for questionnaires, interviews and a seminar to obtain their ideas and experiences about playfulness in their work as family therapists.

A questionnaire will be sent to all six therapists prior to the interview to help them focus their ideas regarding playfulness in their work. The responses to the questionnaires and data collected from the interviews will provide theoretical conceptual categories. As these interviews are reviewed from tape recordings, data will be coded, analyzed and categorized simultaneously. The local concept of playfulness will be explored from the experiences of these therapists. Any additional data collection that becomes necessary to saturate conceptual categories in the process of theory development will be completed. Following the saturation of categories from interviews and questionnaires, the theory developed will be organized in a conceptual frame which will be discussional in nature.

This will be presented to the six therapists at a seminar where any additional data will be collected, coded, and analyzed as needed.

The intended outcome of the research project is the discovery of theory related to the identification of playfulness and its usefulness in family therapy.

CHAPTER IV

INTERVIEW AND SEMINAR DATA OBTAINED

Introduction

This chapter is a presentation of the data obtained during six interviews and one two-hour seminar with the family therapists interviewed for this study.

The chapter includes the summary of each interview, a letter of appreciation to those therapists interviewed, a listing by category of responses from the six family therapists and a manuscript of the seminar that we had together.

This chapter does not, in any way, provide an assessment, evaluation or synthesis of data.

Interviews

This section contains the summary of interviews and the summary listing of responses from all six therapists. The interviews averaged two hours in duration with the first one being the shortest and increasing in length as each successive interview was conducted. Each interview helped the interviewer formulate more effective ways of asking the questions and new questions that evoked more information and new areas to explore. This accounted for the increase in time for the next interview and provided the interviewer with more sophisticated means of interviewing.

Approxiamtely six months elapsed between the first and last interview. Although this was not the initial schedule intended for the collection of data there appears to have been no significant problems as a result of the time frame.

Summary of Interviews

Steve Maxner

Steve M. says that playfulness is a way to engage the family in counseling topics/directions which are consciously designed to shift the focus of communication from the intensity of a particular stressful situation to a "light - fun oriented" framework for the purpose of allowing temporary relief from painful emotions and at the same time teaching the family that they are in fact capable of relating to one another in a humorous, carefree, non-confrontational and enjoyable manner.

He adds that he seeks to interject playfulness into sessions as a regular component. He uses it with a family when there is an increase in frustration with the session and everyone is blocked; at the start of a session to alleviate tension; and as a way of overcoming resistance. Steve M. refers to it as an art form (like using colors on a palet - different colors throughout in different amounts and different forms.).

Playfulness is difficult to explain precisely, and prior to our interview he had never assigned a name to what he had been doing. Sometimes a brief statement poking fun at a family situation, or a smile or some other facial expression communicates something different to the family, and allows them to experience each other in more enjoyable

manner. Steve M. observes that playfulness helps to reduce stress within a family, helps them overcome frustrations so that they can view crisis as not so overwhelming or irreversible. During playful situations a family experiences at least a momentary change, and this suggests to the family that change is possible and that there is a way out of their dilemma.

According to Steve M., playfulness cuts through excessive introspection which he sees as a major contribution to maintaining problems. Changing the focus from the problem process allows space for different and/or new ideas to emerge.

Another use of playfulness that Steve M. identifies is to help the therapist himself. By maintaining an attitude of playfulness, he feels ready to change the focus or direction of communication when necessary. This has been particularly helpful to him when he was uncertain of which direction to pursue with a family, feeling that he was as stuck as they were. Using playfulness to "pull" himself out of the family confusion can prevent he and the family from getting stuck again.

This also provides a modeling of behavior which is relieving of stressfulness when problems arise. He adds that this is only a temporary relief and in fact helps the family return to the issue at hand with a less intense emotionalness. It facilitates his relationship with families by allowing them to be more relaxed and open with him.

The forms of playfulness that he identifies are levity, humor, change of pitch of voice, talking positively about someone to another family member in his presence, and asking a family to regress.

He cautions that the way to bring a family into the playfulness should be seen as helpful rather than seen as making light of their problem or poking fun at them.

Steve M. feels that playfulness is important for doing therapy and that it should and can be taught to other therapists. While a cognitive understanding of it and its importance needs to be learned, he feels that the best ways to introduce this is through video tapes and/or one-way mirror experiences. The more experience and wisdom a therapist has, the more likely he will be able to employ playfulness effectively.

Steve Gross

Steve Gross says that playfulness is a main goal for him in that he tries to bring the family's interaction into a playful category. By doing this he says that it changes in the therapy what are problems and conflicts into an arena of caring as opposed to hostility. This allows the family to say things that they couldn't before because the caring was not a part of that. Implicit in playfulness is caring. Playfulness then creates a caring context. This feeling of care then helps people remember why they want to go through with this process of therapy.

Playfulness is a way of caring or loving and touching people in a lighthearted way which allows the intervention to be accepted more easily. A way of connecting in a safe way that gives everyone the experience of a certain joy of being together or of being with themselves. To have this experience when together is a goal of therapy. Playfulness creates a larger perspective and suggests that things are changeable because there

are other pictures as well.

Playfulness is also helpful to the therapist. Steve G. claims that it gives him access to the family in a broader sense. What is initially presented by them is not the whole picture. The playful side of the family helps him understand what the family will respond to and what they are capable of. In this way, playfulness is diagnostically helpful. A therapist wants to know how much stress a family can focus on before they need a break. There is a balance point with families where you try to keep them focused on issues long enough to make some progress but not to the point of getting bogged down and further depressed. When it starts to swing in this direction, playfulness can lighten the mood, but you must not allow them to become too flighty. This process of employing playfulness to help keep a family balanced is also helpful to the therapist says Steve G. It protects him from getting caught up in what the family presents as the clear and simple definition of the problem. Playfulness also protects him from the family's emotional responses to their definition, gives him some distance and keeps him in touch with where he's going in therapy.

Steve G. uses playfulness intermittently throughout the therapeutic relationship with the family. It is helpful as a means of joining a family - helping them to be more at ease with the setting, the therapist, and each other in this setting. Some forms that playfulness takes for Steve are humor, teasing, sarcasm, joking, absurd conclusions, silliness, gossiping in the presence, paradox, irrelevant remarks, something off center, and recreational orientated tasks. He finds that it is most powerful when it is role modeled because it illustrates to the family

a way to talk about serious things while being playful. This shows how you can manage your feelings while moving back and forth. In other words, playfulness is serious and you're not asking the family to give that up - you're asking them to take that and use it as a problem solving tool. Then it's a matter of modeling or demonstrating the limits. This keeps them working in a light-hearted way but keeps them doing the job. Playfulness can also be useful to a family that comes in and just wants to be playful, using it in a way to protect themselves from the hard work that they need to do with each other. Steve G. says to "play out the playfulness". His experience has taught him that the overabundance of lightheadedness seems to reach a point where the family begins to think of serious things, and this begins to show up in the content of the playfulness. Playfulness demonstrates a caring, and as a family begins to feel safe, it begins to be more direct with each other feeling that their comments are couched in the forms of playfulness and can therefore be heard. His experience has shown that this often leads a family to the idea of "It's time for business".

There is not always a need for playfulness and this is particularly true, warns Steve G.. When a family is talking about serious concerns but is not using anger, sadness, or any other emotion in ways that prevent them from solving problems. Here people are behaving in functional ways.

Introducing playfulness during a therapeutic session is a matter of trying not to offend the family's limits and uniqueness. Most people, he finds, can tolerate a light-hearted comment so long as it's not a direct attack on them. Playfulness allows Steve G. to introduce to the

family directly but lightly the idea that he doesn't really believe or completely accept what one member of the family is saying about the other. Despite what they are saying, his playful comment or attitude can comment to the family that he can still see that person as likeable or valuable - maybe the family member is always late or messy, but he doesn't have to feel the same way about him as they do.

Training family therapists to be playful can be done directly according to Steve G., but the experience of the therapist is most important. He has found that beginning therapists are more focused on the mechanics of the therapeutic process. Therefore, they don't seem to have the confidence with their work to access that aspect of themselves. Once the therapist becomes more comfortable as a therapist, the playful aspect of his/her personality can be focused on more directly. Steve G. has found that you can ask a therapist to go into a session and set someone at ease and that you can actually ask them to be playful in the session. One-way mirrors allow us to introduce this idea earlier because you can monitor the therapist's behavior, give him/her immediate feedback, and create a facsimile of an on-stage situation. Just as you can say to a comic, "you're a comic, go out there and make them laugh", you can say to a therapist, "you need to lighten things up in there, go in there and set them at ease, be playful". The one-way mirror as well as video equipment also allows for modeling for a therapist. You can ask a therapist to watch the ways that you are playful and to make note of the impact it has on the family and the session. Several case illustrations will illuminate Steve's work.

"Long distance costs more" broke family tension with this statement. Getting mother to talk with daughter - when they started to do this they were on opposite sides of the room and the communication was not clear. Steve made this comment, "Long distance costs more" and it was a turning point in the session. He explains that this playful statement competed successfully with the fear and anger, making things safe to move closer and then allowed them to do what they wanted to.

A family of overextenders-everyone works too much - "Working off the clock" became the phrase that redefined their behavior and reframed their distancing from each other as commitment. Daughter who was not taking care of herself was caretaking for others but to a fault with respect to her functions within the family. He asked the parents to be moderating foremen and not let the worker "work off the clock" to the extent that it would hurt the work force or the worker would burn out or shut down at one point. It was his goal to have it become a symbolic statement and a playful cue that could be used on-going during the therapy.

Janine Roberts

When Janine thinks about playfulness, her associations go something like this: intuition, imagination, right brain, improvisation, theatre, conjecture, incongruity, laughter, humor, shift of frames, a shift to another level, fantasy, pleasure, and unstuckness. For her, improvising, laughter, humor, and the expressive aspects of therapy stand out as the most central ideas. Janine sees playfulness as occurring in three areas of the family therapeutic context: amongst the family itself,

amongst the team behind a one-way mirror or within the mind of the therapist, and at the level of understanding the incongruity in the family between what the family is seeing and what they are saying or doing. She sees playfulness in families as an indication of healthiness and so to evoke it in them is a goal.

With the team behind the one-way mirror and/or within the mind of the therapist, Janine sees playfulness as a process that helps to "renew" the therapist. It helps the therapist get unstuck by upsetting his/her own expectations of what are the family's limits. When the therapist gets in a rut with a family or gets bored, it's important to elicit new data. Playfulness accesses new ideas and new ways of viewing what the family has for ways of doing things and working on problems. Janine refers repeatedly to the idea of stimulating right-brain activity and therefore more expressive aspects of a person's behavior. When the therapist and/or team can be playful with themselves, it can be helpful in their breaking themselves out of the rut with the family and formulating new ideas and interventions. The expressive activities of playfulness within the team may be kept behind the mirror and used only to formulate ideas and interventions while at other times, these activities may be brought directly into the room.

In the third area that Janine identifies as the incongruities within the family, she says that when she identifies these incongruities she often looks for playful interventions to upset these incongruities and therefore perturbation to change for a family and perturbations to change are what she looks for in conducting family sessions.

Janine believes that playfulness can be introduced into the therapeutic relationship at any stage. The determining factors about when and how to introduce it relate to specifically what the family presents to you, what you think they can tolerate, and what they need to address the incongruities between levels. But she cautions that one needs to be careful not to be disrespectful to the family when being playful. She says that is an area that she is particularly concerned about when discussing family therapy with therapists who practice other therapeutic approaches and when addressing beginners in the field. She feels that the word playful may be an unacceptable term for the profession. Others associate a less serious attitude about it and it may reinforce the "gimicky" reputation that some of the family therapy field has been assigned. She would prefer to refer to playfulness as the expressive aspects of therapy in order to avoid this problem. Expressiveness within a family that is accompanied by laughter and spontaneity is the healthiness that she looks to uncover.

The forms of playfulness that Janine thinks to use most frequently are humor, metaphors, stories, crazy ideas, and rituals. Her case illustrations reflect these ideas best. With a case where the mother and daughter were depressed and so hopeless the more she was positive, the more they acted depressed. So she decided to be depressed and hopeless also and as she presented herself in this way to this dyad they began to shift and options began to open up.

In another case, the family had been in and out of therapy as their pattern. They came in to work with her team laughing about their

problems, joking and talking about vacations. The team saw this as incongruous with being in therapy and so her idea was to get a statement in the room about what was happening. Her first impulse was for each member of the team to take turns going in the room and telling everyone what they did on vacations. This was not what happened but it did break the team's frustrations about the family's resistance.

When training family therapists, Janine feels that a thread of what is playfulness and its use should be present throughout the training. It should be done in a way that people do not see you as being silly with it or not serious enough about it. People need to recognize your respect for it. Janine suggests that the best way to introduce it is to show video tapes for beginning therapists. In order for them to appreciate it fully, every attempt must be made to show it in context so they can see how playfulness interfaces with the whole picture of therapy. Another means of training family therapists to be more playful according to Janine is improvisation training in theatre.

Sandy Blount

Sandy says that playfulness is a way of teasing for flexibility of meanings that are slightly different from ways that are accepted and legitimate in the family. Playfulness in therapy is about what you do and the rules about what you do. What makes it playful is that you're dealing with the interrelationship between behavior and the rules in the interrelationship of levels of meaning. By working with the meanings we engender flexibility and this makes things more elastic. It's like working with dough. You do not add anything, you just stretch it

to its extremities.

Playfulness is a context marker that says you do not have to be held responsible for what you say and you do not have to be right. You do not have to work within the rules and so it's about how levels come together and we get to look at the rules by not having to follow them. It's like being in an elevator. Everyone has a certain system of behavior when they're in an elevator. Everyone also has a system of behaviors when the context is playfulness. These behaviors are set in motion almost automatically when the context is established. So in this way it breaks down the family's patterned process of logical thought and introduces differentness.

Diagnostically, Sandy finds that playfulness is a way of determining a family's rigidity index and looking for ways and areas in which the family is flexible. This is important to the therapist because it tells him/her where the family is most likely able to begin to play with meanings and look for alternatives. Sandy believes that any suggestion or introduction of change must be done through the structure of how you communicate rather than through direct communication. Reality in families is negotiated so therefore they have choices. They can negotiate differently and playfulness is a way of negotiating which suggests flexibility. Playfulness suggests that rules are flexible and this is important for change. It gives you access to the rules, letting you talk about the rules because you're saying this is not serious, it does not have to change. This allows the family to get some distance from the problem. This introduces the idea of differ-

entness and what is different is likely to sound playful when it's not couched as different. If I say yes when you say no, then we are just arguing. But if you say A and act and/or speak in a way that makes A maybe yes, or maybe no, then I have made things more flexible and this may sound playful. For example, "who can get your mother's goat best?" said to two children in a family. It's said in a way that makes it sound as though we're not trying to fix it. This gives them distance on the problem.

During the process of circular questioning, which is central to establishing a systemic epistemology, the therapist asks questions about the problem to the various members of the family. As this questioning begins to unfold, the interactional sequence within the family is being acted out. This then helps the family and the therapist to understand the interactional definitions of their problems and helps them understand their rules for negotiating which establishes their patterns. However, Sandy has found that the circular questioning process is often very difficult for families and that they are uncomfortable with it. He finds that playfulness can be of great assistance here since playfulness is something with which people are usually more familiar and with which they can engage. Playfulness then facilitates the circular questioning by getting the family to be flexible at that moment and therefore keeping the process moving.

The major forms of playfulness for Sandy are humor, running on the meaning, randomness with children in the families, and games. Humor can be a quick one liner or a joke which has a metaphorical meaning. It may

be directed at something a family member does or at something that the therapist himself/herself does. It's really an attitude that communicates differentness and/or alternatives and lets the family step back from their problem. Running on the meanings has to do with saying or expressing or acting out meanings that are slightly different from the ways that are accepted and legitimate in the family. This expands the context that the family presents and lets them think about it from a different perspective. The random element is available when kids are involved in the families with which you are working. If you get them to be playful in the room, they will say and do things which are out of the usual behavioral repertorie that they might want to show. Then you can use them as behavior or meanings that you the therapist can incorporate in the therapeutic process because they come under the topic of legitimate things to say and do. Games are an arena in which to be playful. Games provide a structure through which the openness and inflexibility of the rules is part of the playing because games are about the relationship of doing and rules. Being playful during a game then is often a natural outcome.

Playfulness can be used at any time when you're changing the meaning of the situation without changing the behavior or the interaction of the behavior. It's the same structure of a joke and the punch line. It changes the meaning of what came before it rather than the data and within the meaning all the data fits.

Sandy cautions not to use playfulness when you are joining meanings that are not negotiable and that you are not concerned about nego-

tiating. When you are saying to a family "this is a family with great intensity in caring", you do not act playful. You are, in this case setting the context for flexibility and so you want to set a meaning that everyone assents to - you are tying them into a meaning that they have to break out of, but in order for them to break out, you do not want to communicate the notion that this is flexible but rather that it's utterly inflexible and so you are very serious.

Introducing playfulness into the therapeutic context is similar to introducing it to someone training to do family therapy. Sandy proposes to keep it subtle because it lives in the structure of the communication. The premises that people use to punctuate interaction are not conscious when they are in action. The premises in action are the feelings. To discuss them at a level one or verbal level is not very helpful. Therefore, it has to live in the structure over and over again so that many cases add up to a generalization. You build level two premises by having many different communicational examples with the family. By setting this context we begin to process information in the structure of the context in which we spend most of our time. Trainees and families pick this up naturally over time.

For training therapists Sandy also suggests that the Socratic method is along these same lines. The trainee asserts that the family operates in a certain way. The trainer then says, "if it operates in that way, then what would it mean for so and so to do this". The trainer does not have to argue. Anything they say is fine, and the trainer just presents other possibilities to their propositions. The

Socratic method has the playful quality to it of a mother dog playing with her pup. The notion is that we are looking for flexibility of ideas.

Modeling is the other means of training which Sandy feels is most important. He sees being playful within the team and being flexible in his own personal style essential to learning to be flexible.

Sandy therefore prefers to introduce playfulness through interactional sequences at the meta level. Teach the trainee to say certain things that create playfulness - elicit the following information without making people defensive. Playfulness is a meta behavior, a description of the relationship of behaviors and meaning.

After the family developed a systemic notion of what was going on, one member was saying to the others - this is how the situation impacts on me - and this is how I would change - a move to a more interactional definition of the problem - then the I.P. spoke up and said, "I don't know what's going on here - I'm the one who is sick here". Sandy turned to him and said, "that's right, if anybody for a minute tries to take away your status, we'll all fight to the death to protect you as the patient in this family." Everyone laughed. Then he thanked him for protecting the family from other's looking at things differently by holding on to the role of patient. It gave the family some options from the resetting that he was trying to do - by appreciating him for trying to do that and it gave them options to it.

When Sandy wanted the family to have access to the rules, the assignment was to play Monopoly. There were five adult children liv-

ing in the home. The I.P. had anxiety attacks and one son had just stopped drinking. In looking at who is the most selfish and who was the most selfless: the selfish were doing the best, the selfless were most symptomatic, and the I.P. and parents were most selfless. Sandy gave them a serious directive that he said would probably not make sense but it needed to be done before we could move ahead - play Monopoly. The rules were different: the most selfish each had their own piece and could move every turn. The two next selfish were allowed two out of three turns. The mother and daughter I.P. were to share a piece and allowed to move one out of three turns. The father was to bring everyone drinks and be the waiter to the family. The therapist told them to play the game twice and sent them home to call him when they had completed the task. He didn't hear from them for six months. When they came back the I.P. had been four months without anxiety attacks but had two just before the session. She had gotten a job and three other kids had moved out - she was saying no to people around the house now and acted as though it came from Sandy. Then she came back the next week and said she didn't want to come back anymore. What happened was that they were playing with relationships between behavior and rules. They played with the notion of meta organization and interaction - played a game - the game is same as ritual. Rituals are dropped into the meanings of families over generations. Games are interaction right now and they played with it. They had access to the whole picture, and they struggled with it because they were rigidly bound by the rules. It created a sense of wanting rules to be different without even saying the rules had to be different.

The first time had a lot of power and by the second time they had already gotten the point. Yet they still dragged through it.

Serena Bloomfield

Serena says that her approach is always playful, that it's part of her style but that she doesn't think that she really plans times to use it. It just seems to happen for her and is part of her style of interacting with people. She sees it as a way of evoking information without talking directly about problems. Serena feels that playfulness is a process that helps people feel comfortable and creates what she calls a "yes set". A "yes set", as Serena defines it, is when people are just going along with you and when they are engaged in the relationship. When this is established she says that she can slip almost any comment into the conversation. It may be shocking, or serious, jovial, or whatever and the family is more likely to receive it when they are in this "yes set". By being playful she feels that she can be more connected and joined with a family because it puts everyone more at ease. This disengages people from the problem set, even if just for a moment, and this makes them more available to her and more open and available for interventions. She sees playfulness as a way to change the meaning of a context, a way to loosen interactions, to change an experience, and to loosen boundaries between family subsystems. Serena says that it does not necessarily have to include laughing or joking but that she believes playfulness taps into the "right brain". Once the "right brain" has been tapped the family is less rigid and more ready for change.

Serena says that a family's ability to be playful shows her that they have a wider range of behaviors from which to draw upon. She also sees herself using it to look for a family's flexibility.

Some of the time Serena directs her playfulness into her interaction with the children in the family as a way of communicating to the parents. Specific forms of playfulness which she identified were imitating speech, mixing up words, illusion of control through the provision of alternatives and by upsetting expectations by re-defining the context either verbally or by playful responding.

The times that she feels most intentional about introducing playfulness is when she feels that the family is being resistant to therapy or each other. In such cases, the family may appear to be avoiding or trying to "squirm" away from the problem. Playfulness here re-defines their behavior on a contextual level. She cooperates with their resistance by being playful. Therefore, for them to continue to resist they have to cooperate with the playfulness, thus breaking through the resistance.

Serena feels that playfulness can be helpful to the therapist as a way to stay back a little while appearing to be a way that you're not - involved but not over-involved. While listening to the family you have a framework in your own mind, even if you're not communicating it to the family. Playfulness in the mind of the therapist helps her from getting caught. She describes it as a way of "teasing herself". This helps her work with the family on two levels simultaneously - interacting with them and thinking all the time about how to see it

differently so that she can create with them a new experience which can lift them out of the problem set. Playfulness slowly lifts the content to another plane and is therefore an intervention by itself. Serena says that this part of her work is something she learned from her Southern heritage. She learned from that influence a graciousness, a way of talking and chatting which includes teasing and making jokes. She says that she can imagine Southern men saying the most incredible things to one another, patting each other on the back and laughing, "too bad you lost that big deal" while laughing about it. Here the men are able to interact without having to be over-identified with the problem.

Another fact that Serena reports influences her playfulness is that she is a woman. In her view, women stereotypically have a less direct way of being with people. Teasing, playfulness, flirting (not sexually) are natural expressions for a woman and not so much for a man. As a woman she feels that she is more expressive and that this may be because women do not have the learning that teaches them how to have theories about what they're saying or thinking or feeling. The feeling comes out and does not come through the analytical part of the brain. She adds however that professional women have more experience with this and are more capable of taming down their expressiveness so that they do not put themselves in a one down position. Generally, a man's view is, "I'm in charge here" while for women it's more her position that says, "Like me". Because of these differences between men and women, Serena suggests that women's playfulness and comments about her playfulness

must be looked at differently. Women are trained and conditioned differently and so much be understood through this differentness.

Training others to be playful is like training someone to be spontaneous, claims Serena. Hopefully everyone has some playfulness in their style and each therapist's style must be developed. A therapist has to learn all that he/she has available to them. She feels that she was taught in a stilted way - taught to use an intervention as a theory to influence people. But she was never taught to see everything she had to help people and she believes that means everything! A theory base is important, she adds, because it gives the therapist the ability to give the family new experiences and that's like interacting on two levels simultaneously in the room with the family while thinking all the while about how to see it differently, so as to create a new experience for a family to lift them out of the problem set. The experience of the therapist is very important because this allows him/her to be more comfortable with him/her self. The best means for teaching it is to use video tapes to identify the playfulness, punctuate it on the spot with the one-way mirror and confirming it with immediate feedback when the therapist comes back behind the mirror. Once a therapist begins to recognize their style and can be playful, playfulness can help them keep their boundaries as a therapist by allowing them to switch on and off. From this view, being playful really makes you present with the family and allows you to step back and think of interventions while remaining connected.

Dan Bannish

When Dan was initially presented with the idea of playfulness in family therapy, he said that it was not a concept he had previously considered explicitly. Although he could think of interactions with families that were playful, he had never thought of those interactions as being playful prior to our interview. He thought of it in terms of joking as a way of joining with a family and when things begin to feel comfortable enough. After reading and thinking about the local concepts which are presented in this research paper, he began to identify more playfulness in his work. In fact, the mere mention and introduction of it when we agreed upon a meeting time had an impact on him.

During our interview he related the following case example that had occurred just a few nights prior to our interview. A family that he and his team had been seeing for several months had resisted talking about their families of origin. Their protection of this area of information was in turn affecting the team which had also been hesitant to push into this area. When they came to therapy this particular night, they began by discussing the assignment which had been given three weeks ago and which reminded them of an incident regarding the wife's father. It seems that one night, while she was still living at home, her father went out to get some milk and bread. He returned two years later, and, she added, without the milk and bread. The couple really thought this funny and their laughter was contagious for the therapist and team. Dan reports that as a result of the engaging appearance of the family's playfulness, the therapist's alternatives suddenly expanded.

He felt more ready to go into extended family information and so initiated more questioning in regard to the couple's respective families of origin. The playfulness seemed to signal to the therapist that the family felt safe and ready to delve into this area. Dan thinks that playfulness may be a way of engaging individuals with each other in a way that keeps a relationship safe. In this case, the family introduced playfulness, but he says that it can also be introduced by the therapist.

Dan uses humor frequently with families when he feels joined with them and when he feels that they'll accept it from him. Once he's reached this point with a family, he thinks that the therapy is able to move on to another step, and the family is more engaged. Another form that Dan likes to introduce to families is story-telling. In one case example where the identified patient was an encopretic child he asked the little children to sit down on the floor, then told the parents that he was going to tell the children a story. The story was actually for the parents. The notion of sitting down on the floor and telling a story is a form of a playful situation - it's a fun kind of thing to do. The kids loved the story, everyone was engaged, and everyone liked the story. In this type of situation, Dan hopes to present a symbolic message to the family in a form that is comfortable for them and that will increase their receptiveness. A third form of playfulness that Dan employs is taking a one down position with a family. This way, he says, he can make a funny mistake that daringly shows the problem and they can correct me. In these situations he is allowed to say things that he could not normally say because they would not accept it or hear it.

Dan cites an example: a family where the father was a minister was ostensibly in therapy for their 26 year old son. However, one of the parents had had an affair and this was an underlying problem which was not acknowledged. Dan repeatedly talked about the commandments regarding adultery but quoting it incorrectly or misreferencing it so they kept correcting him. Through this he could show them that he really didn't know something so they could hear it and they could treat him playfully for his mistakes. In this way they were able to indirectly talk about the affair while simultaneously agreeing together that they were not going to talk about it. (This refocused them on the problematic son.)

In most cases, Dan adds that playfulness seems to just occur spontaneously. When this occurs he feels that he would like to be better at it so that he could be better at reframing behavior. He would like to improve on his ability to present things in a more ironic way, maybe in a symbolic form that people can chuckle at and where they can understand the symbolism of it.

Diagnostically, Dan says that when he sees a family that can be playful, it makes him feel better about them because things are not so tense. It also makes him realize that the family with problems can also have fun together. So it may be a sign, he says, that there is a connection within the family that allows people to be comfortable and relaxed with each other and that it's not entirely an antagonistic relationship. Therefore, the prognosis is better. Playfulness may be a family skill that families must learn together and in order to manage tense and anxious situations. It's an evolutionary part of a family's

life together. In fact, Dan adds, it may be a skill to use to interact with the community. If you are using irony or playfulness you have to have the capacity to see things in a few different ways so that it is ironic or humorous. This indicates a degree of flexibility which is in turn a positive prognostic sign.

Playfulness in the mind of the therapist is not something Dan says he ever really thinks about in a playful way. However, he thinks that it might be helpful getting him unstuck and to get some distance from the system. Dan thought that word games may be helpful to accomplish this. By this he means that the therapist could learn to use words differently, punctuating sentences differently, using different intonations, and inflections. He finds it easier to do this out loud with other people and so it might occur more frequently on his team behind the one-way mirror.

One family case example that Dan discussed addressed the issue of breaking through a family's playfulness when the family seemed to be using it to exclude the therapist and prevent the therapy from progressing. Dan decided to tell a joke, which was in line with this affect, but he told it in a manner which was very different from the affective style presented by the family. He intentionally told a bad, not funny joke and dragged it out to the point where no one knew how to respond to this very boring and not funny story. It broke the family pattern of excluding the therapist and readied them for the therapy.

Cautions of when not to be playful were categorized by Dan for the following situations:

1. Reactive depressions. When someone dies in a family and the family is displaying appropriate grief.
2. When a family comes in and wants to talk about the doom and gloom in a functional way so that their emotions are productive.
3. When Dan's own impulse is to make the family feel better right away like a "quick fix".

On the issue of training therapists to be playful, Dan felt that you could let people know how playfulness can be used but they have to use their own style in being playful. Training comes from allowing therapists to know that they can have a good time with a family and they don't have to spend all their time going after the problem. Dan feels that it is important to recognize what the family presents to you as playful because through their playfulness they may be trying to say something else or even responding to an intervention somehow. Dan sees the structure of playfulness as very similar to paradox and reframing and that one way of training family therapists to be playful is to be paradoxical with other team members when it's so blatant and obvious to everyone. It has a way of shifting things that is very funny. One example is when a therapist is nervous about an upcoming session and the team tells him to be nervous for the first 15 minutes or not to even go into the room. It's so obvious what is being said and it breaks some of his tension and nervousness.

Dan cautions that if playfulness is thought of too early in a trainee's training that people may try to force themselves to use it and therefore the spontaneity of it will be lost. Instead, Dan says

wait until it happens and then punctuate it. The object is not necessarily to be funny or make people laugh, but rather to break the stuck dysfunctional pattern within the family. The experience of the therapist is important.

Concerning the question of men/women differences with regard to being playful in therapy, Dan responded with the idea that men may have more opportunity to be playful while growing up. In sports he remembers that members of a team would often be playful with each other about their performance in practice or a game and that this helped develop a comraderie amongst the team. Also in dating, he learned that the way to attract a girl was to make her laugh and that women seemed to be in a more reactive role socially and have more limits on their emotional expressiveness interactively.

Besides team experience and dating, Dan feels that playfulness was something he learned through family experiences on the family potato farm. Each year all of his relatives would gather to help sort, package, ship, and store that year's potato crop. Much of that work took place down in the cellar where it was dark and damp and the job was boring and repetitious. What developed amongst them was a playful style of interaction to make the work go quicker and seem less boring. They joked with each other, teasing and laughing at each other as they worked. It was actually something that they enjoyed largely due to the playful interaction they experienced.

Dan's closing comment was, "if people had ways of being playful each day with each other, they may have no need to come to therapy."

His own dissertation is about using Doonesbury cartoons as a way of giving adolescents a way to view their own adolescence. The cartoons let the adolescent be identified and yet they keep their options - "that's me but that's not me" and cartoons by definition are expected to be lighthearted.

Categories

The next section includes the follow-up letter which was sent to each interviewee prior to the seminar. This section also contains a summary of each interview broken down into specific categories. Each category contains a listing of specific responses provided by each interviewee and respective responses are separated by a line drawn between them. The examples and statements have been excerpted from interview summaries.

About the Categories

It was my distinct experience, while I was organizing this material, that responses could easily fit into several categories. This was initially very distracting until I realized that what was happening here was exactly what happens in working with families. Behavioral patterns in a family have at least several levels of meaning occurring simultaneously. In fact, it is our desire to identify differences and reframe those patterns into conceptualizations that suggest new alternatives. In doing this we know that all topics are systemically related to all other topics. Therefore, to select a category is technically arbitrary, an act of judg-

ment on my part. Out of the entire systemic interaction I have extracted conceptual constructions which provide meaning that help to organize the complexity of the entire system. They are, however, not neat and precisely separable.

As a reader of this material, I imagine that you might also experience some of this. I hope that this is not as distractive to you as it was to me. If you do have some strong suggestions about reorganizing any of these statements into other categories, feel free to pass them along to me.

Thank you.

Dear

Thank you for your assistance and cooperation in this project. I have finished reviewing and summarizing our interview and the resulting information has been categorized for your review. The categories that I have identified follow much the same format that the interviews followed. As a reader of these categories, you may generate some of your own categories and this will be helpful to me as it may be for you in organizing this data. Also included is a summary of our interview together.

As you read through this information, please expand it in any way that comes to mind for you, critique it as you wish, and please keep the following questions in mind as you go through it:

1. Did I misrepresent anything you said?
2. Did I leave out anything that was important to you?
3. As you've been working as a family therapist, have you had additional thoughts about using playfulness?
4. Is there any way that you would like to refine what I have said in my summary?
5. Might we be able to come up with a theoretical-technical definition of playfulness together upon which we can agree?

I look forward to meeting with you again!

Thank you,

Norm

Interview Categories

1. Definitions of playfulness

- reduces stress
- shifts focus
- light-fun oriented
- humorous
- model for relating to each other differently

-
- shifts focus from problems and conflicts (hostility) into arena of caring
 - way of loving in a lighthearted way
 - safe context
 - joyful experience together
 - suggests that things are changeable
 - laughter right brain
 - humor

-
- improvising
 - expressive aspects of therapy
 - jumping levels

- incongruity
 - imagination
-

- teasing for flexibility
 - the interrelationship of levels of meaning - this refers to the relationship between behavior and the rules. It is about what you do and the rules about what you do
 - context marker - says you do not have to be held responsible for what you say and do not have to be right. You do not have to work within the rules and so it is about how levels of meaning come together
 - a way to look at the rules by not having to follow them
-

- a way of evoking information without talking directly about problems
 - a process that helps people feel comfortable (safe)
 - creates a "yes set"
 - connects you to family
 - disengages people from the problem set
 - more available for interventions
 - way to change the meaning of a context
 - to loosen interactions - boundaries between subsystems
 - to change an experience
 - taps right brain
 - a way of joining
-

- joking
- expands alternatives
- creates safeness in relationship
- humor
- storytelling
- one-down strategy

2. Diagnostic Uses of Playfulness

Helps a therapist know how much stress a family can focus on before they need a break. There is a balance point with families where you try to keep them focused on issues long enough to make some progress but not to the point of getting bogged down and further depressed. Indicates what the family will respond to and what they are capable of.

She sees playfulness within the family as a sign of the healthiness within a family with its accompanying laughter and spontaneity.

Playfulness is a way of determining a family's rigidity index and looking for ways and areas in which the family is flexible. This tells the therapist where the family is most likely able to begin with meaning and to look for alternatives.

A family's ability to be playful shows that they have a wider range of behaviors from which to draw upon. She uses it also to look for a family's flexibility.

When he sees a family that can be playful, it makes him feel better about them because things are not so tense. It also makes him realize that this family with problems can also have fun together. So it may be a sign that there is a connection within the family that allows people to be comfortable and relaxed with each other and that it's not entirely an antagonistic relationship. Therefore, the prognosis is better. Playfulness may also be a skill which a family can use to interact with the community and therefore its presence may suggest how connected a family is to its community and its supports in the community. If a family can be playful, it has a greater capacity to see things differently and this indicates the degree of flexibility.

3. Forms of Playfulness

a brief statement that pokes fun at the family situation (not its members) a smile, a facial expression that communicates something different to the family levity - humor

change in pitch of voice

asking a family to regress

reporting hopelessness when family is resisting help but saying that it wants help. Taking a one down helpless position

humor, teasing, sarcasm, joking, absurd conclusions, silliness, gossiping with one member of a family while in the presence of the other members, paradox, irrelevant remarks, a comment off center, or recreational tasks.

Improvising

laughter - humor

expressive aspects of therapy

metaphors

stories

"crazy" - fun - lighthearted ideas and rituals

humor - quick one liners or a joke with metaphorical meaning

running on the meaning

randomness with children in the families

in certain games

an attitude

imitating speech

mixing up words

illusion of control through the provision of alternatives and by
upsetting expectations

redefining verbally by playful responding

humor

telling stories especially to children in the presence of their
parents

taking a one down position with a family

making funny mistakes

punctuating sentences differently

different voice intonations and inflections

4. What does playfulness do to the therapeutic process

- during playful situations a family experiences at least a momentary change and this suggests to the family that change is possible, that there is a way out of their dilemma
 - shifts the focus of communication from the intensity of a particular stressful situation to a light, fun oriented framework
 - relieves painful emotions temporarily
 - teaches a family that they are capable of relating in a humorous, carefree, non-confrontative and enjoyable manner
 - relieves frustration and tension
 - helps a family become unblocked
 - helps reduce stress so that a family can view crisis as not so overwhelming or irreversible
 - helps to cut through excessive introspection which may be a major contributor to maintaining problems
 - helps communicate care
 - provides a modeling of behavior for stressful situations
-
- helps to change in therapy what are problems and conflicts into an arena of caring as opposed to hostility
 - helps create a larger perspective and suggests that things are changeable because there are other pictures as well
 - provides therapist with a broader sense of what the family will respond to and what they are capable of
 - helps to protect the therapist from getting caught up in what

the family presents as the clear and simple definition of the problem

- helps in the joining process with the family
- helps to relax the family
- provides a model of behavior which shows a family how they can manage their feelings while problem solving. Playfulness is serious and you're not asking the family to give that up. You're asking them to take that and use it as a problem solving tool. This keeps them working in a "lighthearted" way and keeps them doing the job.
- helps the therapist introduce to the family directly, but lightly, the idea that what is being presented is not the whole picture

-
- helps to renew the therapist in that it is a healthy process
 - helps the therapist become unblocked
 - upsets expectations of what are the family's limits
 - provides a process for evoking new data
 - provides for new ways of viewing what the family has for ways of doing things and working on their problems
 - helps to stimulate right-brain activity
 - helps to stimulate more expressive aspects of a family's behavior

-
- sets the context that says to the family - "you do not have to be held responsible for what you say and you do not have to be

right - you do not have to work within the rules"

- engenders flexibility
- helps identify areas where the family is most likely to be flexible
- helps to break down the family's patterned process of logical thought
- introduces differentness
- introduces change through the structure of how you communicate
- suggests a way of negotiating reality differently
- suggests that rules are flexible and this is important to change
- gives a family access to the rules by letting them talk about them in playful context, which says on the one hand, this is not serious - it does not have to change
- helps family get distance from the problem
- aids the process of circular questioning - families are more comfortable during playful experiences and so playfulness integrated into the circular questioning process helps them be more flexible at that moment and therefore keeps the circular questioning process moving
- helps to engage children who are more likely to say and do things that are out of the usual behavioral repertorie that they might want to show. Then you can use their statements and behavior as meanings that can be incorporated into the therapy.
- helps anytime when you're changing the meaning of the situation without changing the behavior or the interaction in the behavior.

It changes the meaning of what came before it rather than the data and within the meaning all the data fits.

- helps evoke information without talking directly about problems
- helps people feel comfortable
- helps facilitate the joining process
- disengages a family from the problem set
- helps to change the meaning of the context
- loosens rigid interactions
 - within the family
 - with the therapist
- taps into right-brain activity
- helps interactions with children
- helps family to experience themselves as being cooperative during a playful situation
- helps therapist keep from getting caught up in family's problem set
- a way for therapist to tease him/her self
- helps to communicate safeness
- engages children through a playful story and this communicates to the parents simultaneously
- helps to increase family's receptiveness of ideas and interventions
- loosens therapist's thinking
 - helps in reframing behavior

- helps in creating interventions
- shows family that it can have some fun together and does not have to always be antagonistic with each other
- helps therapist detach from the problem and get some distance from the system
- helps to break through a family's resistance to the therapist

5. Cautions about using playfulness

- poke fun at the situation, not directly at a person
- the way you bring a family into the playfulness should be seen as helpful rather than seen as making light of their problem
- must be real and genuine - don't force it
- be careful not to make playfulness all humorous. Humor is too drastic a shift for some families at some junctures

-
- when you're directly talking about serious concerns where people are not using their anger or sadness in ways that stop them from solving problems - here people are behaving in functional ways

-
- be careful not to be disrespectful, too silly
 - unacceptable term (playfulness) for the profession

-
- don't use it when you're joining meanings that are not negotiable and that we are not concerned with negotiating - when you say to a family, "this is a family with great intensity in caring" you do not act playful - you are, in this case, setting the context for flexibility and so you want to get a meaning

that they have to break out of - but in order to break out, you do not want to communicate the notion that this is flexible but rather that it's utterly inflexible and so you are very serious - the family must utilize the meanings of the reframed definition in order to break out and change their behavior

- monitor the playfulness so that it doesn't create a situation where a family is unwilling to engage in the therapeutic relationship
 - don't be disrespectful
-

- reactive depressions - when someone dies in a family and the family is displaying appropriate affect
- when a family comes in and wants to talk about the doom and gloom in a functional way so that their emotions are productive
- when his own impulses are to make the family feel better right away like a "quick fix"

6. How to introduce playfulness into therapy

- take charge - can't lose by trying a variety of techniques once you have their trust
 - switching roles - role play - ask them to try something new with you
 - changing voice pitch to introduce a different response or the same response with a different voice pitch
 - every family situation is unique
-

- once you have their trust
 - recognize the family's attitude
 - sarcasm - particularly when someone is down on himself
-

- depends on what the family gives to you
 - look for incongruousness in family between what they're seeing and what they're saying and doing
-

- keep it subtle - it lives in the structure of the communications. The premises the people use to punctuate interaction are not conscious when they are in action. The premises in action are the feelings. To comment on them on a Level I or a verbal level is of no real value. It has to live in the structure over and over again so that many many cases add up to a generalization so that you're building Level II premises by having many different cases (communicational examples) with the family through your interactional communicational structure. Playfulness is one way of saying what is one version of what is, and is only one version of what might be
-

- create the "yes set"
 - slip it in almost anytime during a conversation
 - through the children who are most receptive to being playful
-

- when the family demonstrates and respond in a playful manner to the therapist, then they are probably more open to playful

responses from the therapist

- ask them if he can tell them a joke
- once the therapist feels joined with the family
- seems to occur spontaneously
- directives from the team behind the mirror to the therapist in the room

7. Training other family therapists to be playful

- cognitively - discussing theoretical importance of it
- video taping session - highlighting examples
- one-way mirror
- when a therapist has sufficient experience and is comfortable with himself and the process of therapy

-
- experience and confidence with the work so that aspect of themselves as a therapist can be accessed - not focused more on the mechanics of the beginner's process on an intermediate level
 - focus on that aspect of each therapist's personality
 - modeling for therapists
 - video tapes
 - live - one-way mirror
 - explicit - cognitively - teach them to understand how they best join a family - and set others at ease
 - live supervision - "to in there and lighten things up" like a comic whose task is to go out there and make people laugh
-

- training in theatre work
 - can be introduced early and a thread carried throughout training
 - show video tapes that illustrate it early in training
 - be careful to include a picture of the complete context so they can see how it interfaces with the whole picture of therapy
 - one-way mirror
 - by setting a context the trainee gradually begins to process information in the structure of the context that we spend most of our time in - trainees pick it up just naturally over time
 - Socratic method -
 - you assert that the world is A - I say - if the work is A then what would that mean for so and so. You don't have to argue...
 - if you demonstrate flexibility to the trainee the modeling will train them
 - expose them to examples and the playful process by being playful with them
 - modeling
 - would not want to introduce playfulness cognitively
 - make it a part of the structure of ways to communicate
 - teach at a meter level
 - to say things to families that create playfulness elicit the following information without making people defensive
 - playfulness is a meter behavior - a description of the relationship of behaviors and meaning
-

- try to identify each therapist style of playfulness (which she feels everyone has) and develop it
- teach them to use everything they have
- a theory base is important gives the therapist the ability to give the family new experience
- video tapes
- one-way mirror - punctuate it on the spot and confirm it with immediate feedback

- you might let trainees know how playfulness can be used but they have to use their own style in being playful
- might let them know that they can have a good time with a family and that they do not have to spend all their time going after the problem
- learn to recognize what the family presents to you as playful
- be playful with trainees
- by teaching it too early to trainees they may try to face themselves to use it and then their spontaneity will be lost
- wait until it happens and then punctuate it
- one-way mirror
- video tapes

8. Influences that contributed to and cultivated therapist's playfulness

- life experiences - own family - 5 children - accumulated wisdom - life need not be that serious - learn to laugh at ourselves

- basic philosophy about life - lighthearted - fun - "It's important to see people laugh"
-

- theatre experiences
 - day care with children in extreme poverty situation and in another culture
 - teaching
 - view that playfulness is a healthy aspect of healthy family life
-

- basic way of meeting and joining people
-

- southern heritage and upbringing - graciousness - a way of talking and chatting which includes teasing and making jokes - creates the "yes set"
- being a woman - stereotypically women have a less direct way of being with folks - teasing, playful, flirtatious (not sexually)

Women are more expressive than men - feelings come out and don't come through the analytical part of the brain

- in relationships - men generally have the view of, "I'm in charge here" - where a woman's view is more often "Like me".

Women need to tame this expressiveness so they don't get themselves into a one down position. Professional women tend to be able to manage this better because of their educational experiential training in being analytical.

- team sports - nicknames amongst the teams - teasing each other for mistakes, clumsiness when in most similar situations they wouldn't make the mistake
- family experience - summer work in potato cellar - boring monotonous work - be funny as a way to be attractive to girls - he's our dissertation - using Doonesbury comic strips as a way of giving adolescents a way to read their adolescence - be identified but you can keep your options - "that's me but that's not me".

Seminar

This section contains a copy of the transcript of the two hour seminar with five of the therapists who were interviewed for this project. One therapist was unable to attend and efforts to share seminar results with him could not be arranged.

The interaction among therapists at the seminar seemed to be stiff at first. It was this author's impression that a degree of spontaneity was held back initially until a bid to be playful was proposed. Within a short time ideas and suggestions were offered with ease and the quantity and quality of information was terrific. Spontaneous incidents of playfulness began to arise throughout the remaining time of the seminar as we worked and played through difficult questions. We found it particularly difficult to agree upon a definition of playfulness with which we could all be comfortable.

Norm: What I wanted to achieve by meeting with you is to discuss basically the questions that I wrote on the front sheet of the letter that I wrote to you. First of all, I wanted to make sure that I didn't misrepresent any of you and this was the best way to check that out so I did summarize, and summarizing obviously brings things together in a way that eliminates a lot of what we said. Some of us talked for an hour and half to two hours. I tried to get the central points that you made and tried to interpret it in a way that was exactly the way you said it, so that's one of the things I want to do. Another thing I want to do is talk about a theoretical technical definition for playfulness that we can agree upon. It wasn't agreed upon through our interviews because they didn't occur together and everybody had different ideas. So that's another thing that I wanted to talk about. And the third large area that I wanted to talk about is in fact in any way what this whole study that I have been doing on playfulness, if it's had any impact at all on anything you have done. Have you thought about it at any point in time when you have been working? Has it pretty much remained the same? Has it made you so much more conscious of it so that you haven't used it? Have you developed any new forms that we didn't talk about or have you noticed it in the work with others. Several of you do supervision and maybe you have seen it in other people. I certainly see it more with people now that I have identified it for myself. I see that people do it all the time. It's different for everybody. Those are the major goals that I have for this meeting. Maybe the first one we should

talk about is did I misrepresent any of you in any way, and if so, maybe you can talk about that independently.

Janine: The only thing on mine. I felt it was a real good, succinct pulling together of a lot of ramblin ideas, overall I appreciate it. The only thing was the very last page when you talked about--I said something about training family therapists. It's right in the last sentence. Training family therapists would be more playful according to training in the theatre and that kind of loses the flavor that I was talking about. I was talking about improvisation theatre and its particular kind of training in the theatre. Some of Veolus Bolin's work and not formal theatre training necessarily as much as improvisational theatre. So that's really the only thing I wanted to do some clarifying on.

Norm: That's good that would be a misrepresentation for sure. Thanks Janine! How about you Sandy? Did I misrepresent you in any way?

Sandy: I don't think so. Basically what I had to do is read this and see if it made sense to me now because I haven't a clue what I said when we talked. I felt that it looked good. I was comfortable with it. I liked having this document. I liked having one place where we had put what would never be--a set of values that I would not normally gather together and I feel that it's in front of me and now that I can talk with people about the issue of playfulness in some kind of organized way. Then it would influence me just from my discussion because as is obvious, I never remember what I say.

Norm: So it might have been helpful to get this summary into your life sooner.

Sandy: It's certainly helpful for me to have it now.

Serena: Yeh! I don't remember saying some things, but it wasn't what I did I mean by that. There was one thing that I wasn't sure what I meant. Oh, you can't get me. Or, what you meant by what I meant. I didn't even mark it. It was about theory offering alternatives and I didn't know what I meant or what you meant that I meant. What I thought you meant what you said and certainly I didn't write it as if you made any sense. Yeh! I wished I had marked it. May be toward the end I am trying to remember how I wrote it up. Well, it says a theory basis is important because it gives a therapist the ability to give the family new experiences. I'm not sure what that means and I don't know if that's what I said or not. I mean I think theory is important because it gives the therapist a basis for developing interventions and new ideas and the experience of the therapists.

Norm: What I remember about that now is that at that point you were talking about getting in the room and when you get in the room you bring your whole self in. You were talking about using your whole self but that alone wasn't enough for people. You certainly couldn't just go into the room, you had to have some kind of theory base to understand for conceptualizing what was going on in there and then doing something about it.

Serena: That's what I would have meant, I don't know. O.K.

Norm: How about you Steve?

Steve M.: I feel that you represented my comments accurately. Like Sandy, reading it helped me focus on the whole issue of playfulness, and it helped me re-think it and re-define it. It's helpful to have that information.

Norm: Have you identified any additional forms of playfulness in any of your work or seen it in anybody else's work since I've talked with any of you?

Janine: It's funny we just gave an intervention to a family the other night and I wasn't thinking about playfulness particularly, and I don't know how it will come out, but we are making a board game with them and it is going to be the pursuits of X family. It's that new board game out, the old trivial pursuits and what I've asked them to do for homework is to bring in the little squares of what some of the moves would be and there is going to be some of the typical interactional patterns that they have identified. It's a three generational family that has been working with us for a number of months. It feels pretty stuck right now. So one of the ways that we thought we could kind of identify some of those stuck points was through this board game. I have no idea what's going to come of it. How we got the idea is, I play in a music group and we have been playing together for about seven years and we have had all kinds of various incidents, and so I made a board game for the music group about a year ago.

Just as a kind of a history for our group, so I kind of took the idea off of that. I am trying to think what form of playfulness that fits into. I guess it's trying to play with the team, myself and the family, around some of the places where we're all feeling pretty stuck right now.

Norm: It reminds me of one that Sandy talked about in his interviews and one that you bounced ideas off with me. I don't know that I contributed much to it when you designed it--but the monopoly game. It was designed with the purpose in mind, to really try to bring the interactions out without talking about it, but have them interact. People don't know that because I didn't write that whole sequence out. Maybe you could tell them about that, Sandy.

Sandy: This was simply taking monopoly and changing the rules slightly to fit the family. There were five adult children I think, and we were using sort of the dimensions of the family. I asked, "who was the most this, and who was the most that" and they loved to look at themselves on these various dimensions. The dimension that really got them was selfish vs. selfless, and the identified patient was the second most selfless person, and the mother was the second most selfless, and the most adjusted people were those who were the closest to having jobs and moving out of the house. There were five adult children, all of whom lived at home. The direction that I gave for the board game was that the three most selfish children each moved regularly, that the two less selfish,

more selfless children, moved every other turn and that Mom and the I.P. had to share a piece and move every third turn and Dad who was always peripheral to everything had to sit around and be peripheral and bring people drinks and stuff. They were required to play it twice and I said call me when you've played it twice, and they never called for six months and I just assumed that it was a bomb. Six months later they called and said we finally played it for the second time and we are ready to come and see you. Amazing! A lot of things had happened. Two people had moved out of the house, and one was getting married. Two people had jobs. Things had happened that I had no idea were related to the game, but obviously, they had really gone through some straight out transitional issues. Well, we finally got that written up. We did that years ago and we finally got that written up. I'm not sure how to describe what format that playfulness is either, other than it does cut across all three levels that you had talked about Janine, and it connects them--cause we are making up some cards ourselves with the rules.

Norm: I think the characteristic of transcendence that playfulness allows is maybe one of the parts of that, at least when I think of it what you do is that you just transcend the interaction that you've all gotten stuck in and instead of doing that over and over again, what you've done is you've taken some other medium and through the action of play and playfulness which can result from play (not always, but it can), you can transcend that interaction that you have and people can then begin to see the kinds of relationships

just through an experiential way instead of having to talk about it. Playfulness has a sort of built-in as if quality. It's not the thing. It's as if the thing. And if you can get people to do what they do as if they were doing it, they have to step back and have options.

Janine: See, I think that's the same way hypothetical future questions work sometimes. The family has the same qualities. People are not quite as invested in events having to be happening a certain way, or they don't have the world quite as locked in because they haven't experienced the things they are talking about in hypothetical future.

Norm: There's a family therapist down in Houston or Galveston named Don Williamson. I don't know if you've ever read anything of his? He talks about playfulness and says that it transcends the intense emotionality and of course he does contextual kind of family therapy which is a little different obviously but he sees it as a way to transcend some of the inter-generational kinds of issues that he deals with a lot when he talks about that.

Steve M.: Sandy, can I ask you a question? That example you gave of the monopoly. Theoretically, are you suggesting that those individuals who perhaps previously did not recognize that they were really selfish or those people who identified as doormats and did not recognize that they were doormats. Is that the insight they gained over that six month period of time and just that recognition alone helped them to say, well, I should do something about my responsi-

bility shall we say.

Sandy: I wanted to turn the value of the family around. The value of the families were that the three people who were selfish were in a sense sort of bad, when in fact, they were the closest to functional and the three who were unselfish were the most dysfunctional. And so, I wanted to catch the selfish/non-selfish dicotome in some sort of way that would highlight the family that the non-selfish people were in fact the most dysfunctional people that always sort of giving up was part of a series of keeping one's self from doing anything and so monopoly has this all competitive aspect to it and it has a real-world-making-it kind of flavor. And, so I wanted for the self-inhibitors to feel dramatically self inhibited and to be able to be laughed at in some kind of safe context, rather than to have all the people who are moving closer and closer to being functional and to feel that that was inevitably bad. I think that's one of the reasons the kids never moved out of the house and they didn't get married. They didn't move out because to set up your own life was to stop contributing to the family and to be selfish and therefore to be in good standing you had to stay home.

Dan: It sort of connects ideas at a different level. It has a connecting value to it. It seems to me that playfulness can connect things that would not normally be connected other than the rational thought that people resist that when the emotional investment is in a rationality that sometimes somehow supports that dysfunctional behavior,

and in order to move from that point you have to find some way to connect other ideas to that and it seems that playfulness can create that kind of environment, that kind of emotional attitude and that allows people to then connect ideas. Different ideas to restructure or rethink or reorder some of that rationality that they are using that supports that.

Janine: It seems that surely we can exaggerate a symptom or action like what you were saying at a safer level, and what do you think about that exaggeration. That it helps make the connection, not verbally necessarily, but I can imagine someone saying, "Well, gees you know I'm not making any money here, and then I'll have to make Ha! Ha! insight thing", but it just sort of I think it would change them on all levels.

Sandy: The thing that Don Williamson says, when he talks about different emotions. If you think about emotions as the experience in communication of the contingencies of relationship, then playfulness is taking the same patterns but changing the contingencies, because it's as if, it's not real. But, if you can go through those patterns with different emotional experience of the patterns that communicate so that the next step will happen, you know. I get tense, so you know I'm going to yell, so you do what you do that makes me yell, and we go around this once or twice in which we're kind of giggling with each other and this same pattern no longer has the emotional connection inevitably, and if it doesn't, then it can't happen as inevitably.

Serena: I think that I'd use another word and say it's not that it's not real, but that the consequences are held in suspension, and that in some way, the normal consequences of the event are held aside and therefore new consequences can occur. What is happening is real but it's disconnected from the normal set of consequences that one would expect using a certain form or pattern of rational thought.

Steve M.: So you're saying that it would be important to utilize the technique of playfulness in this regard rather than just point out, or to explain.

Sandy: Right. Because to explain, don't you see how you get upset and then she responds. Her response in discussing that almost certainly would be but I know what he's going to do, it's the only logical response. It doesn't change the feeling sequence. It just reinforces it.

Janine: But if you think of some of the families. If you think of the M. family. I'm not going to say their names, and then you think of the family that I have now, the couple, the N. family, and if you think of the contrast the last two sessions. The level of their ability, to be playful, to talk about something in any kind of a humorous kind of way or using any kind of joking, it's really striking. To me, it's part of why when we watch the M. family, it's like so difficult, it's like we are behind a mirror, and I'm exhausted, and when you watch the N. family, they give you spaces, they give you places, by the way they talk in the room and so on.

Norm: Are they more lighthearted, playful?

Janine: Oh yeh! And the language they use, it's lots of fun.

Steve M: Isn't it our responsibility to teach that particular family lighthearted responses to life situations.

Sandy: Well, that particular family, if we could do that, that would be good.

Janine: I'm not sure that we concentrated on that as directly as we could have and maybe that's because of their connectedness to our field and stuff.

Sandy: Yeh! They're both trained professionals and we wanted to kind of stay within the seriousness so that we would not lose them because they are so dour and clinical. Especially, if you said something funny that wasn't funny, it would fall like a dead albatross, and then they would think that you were stupid, and that sense of blame obviously permeates the family. Everybody feels that they're about to be stupid or inadequate and that's why they stay so down. But it would be a risk at the level with the M. family that it isn't at all, maybe a major risk to be funny with them.

Norm: That brings up a question that I wondered what really stops us or interferes with our using it or helping a family move from a place of not being able to be playful to a place where they can be more playful. Because not that it's the end result as with Winnicott, and his stuff with children where he thinks that that's the end re-

sult, not certainly in family therapy, but it may affect the process that may be the end result, or certainly a goal. What other things interfere with us using it.

Serena: Inexperience. Boundedness to the theory. If you are going through a session step by step by the rules, it's very hard to be playful until you can be reasonably sure that you're going to get through the session one way or another. It's hard to be playful.

Sandy: There are some models that aren't nearly as playful. I think it's the systemic model that's not very playful. It intends to take itself very seriously and doesn't enfranchise the interviewer to use him or herself as much. I have a feeling although I haven't seen a lot of Boscolo and Cecchin except in tapes, I have a feeling that they can be as playful as they want to be, cause it's their thing. But a lot of us who are still chewing on the model are still, even if we feel utterly unbounded in other times that what we are trying to do is systemic approaches that we'll feel that we have to go by the rules and it's harder to be funny.

Norm: I have been playful using that model but it's harder, because if it was a structural model, where the therapist is very central and very active, I think I'm playful 80 percent of the time in these sessions. Do you have any thoughts about it Janine?

Janine: Well I think there hasn't been much theoretical development and notions on the importance of playfulness in any of the models so I think that would be a help, it would sort of upgrade it.

Whittaker, certainly of all the schools, of the experiential schools, you could say, I think probably gives the most weight to it but he's probably been the weakest of the major schools of people who have written theoretically, conceptualized their work and so on. So I think part of what your study would do I hope would help to build more of a theoretical basis so that people would have--just a way to upgrade because this is an important part of therapy and here's some of the reasons that would help to give some other ways to teach it conceptually and so on. So the study would validate a part that's there for everyone, every person I think has some piece in them, some ways, some people just automatically use it but I think it might give them more verification. It's good to use and it would give them more ways to planfully use it like what you were saying. What are ways in a systematic model, you can certainly see through some of the rituals and prescriptions and they are quite playful and where's the rationale for that and how can we sort of pay attention to that and do more with it. In a sense perhaps to give permission to intelligible educational programs with concepts in general to utilize this to legitimize it and here are some tangible examples of how we can utilize it.

Norm: You mentioned in our interview a kind of caution when I had asked people if they were cautious about using it and so on. One of the things that you mentioned to me which really stuck, and which I thought about for a long time was that the term playfulness may be an inappropriate term. You thought that people just can't make any

kind of sobering associations to it. Instead when they do they just all of a sudden lose everything and think of family therapy as being kind of gimmicky. Here's another thing that family therapy is going to do!

Janine: That's one thing experience would be important.

Serena: Margaret Sante said when you're first learning it, it feels so gimmicky. Just like any therapy I think. When you are learning it, really learning a theory, that's the part I talked about, not until you're really comfortable with yourself in the room, I would guess, could you use it to its utmost, to your advantage.

Norm: Several of us talked about using it, punctuating it as it came along. You know when you are in the room and the opportunity comes up when you might just display some playful comment or facial expression or something. Rather than let that go, that's an opportunity to begin to cultivate it. I think you might have said that Sandy, about punctuating it. That's a way to teach it. Oh, I see when you see someone you are supervising. But I think it has to be something that people are more aware of because I don't think they think about it very often, or don't use it as much as they could. I think about using it a lot because I think about how to get unstuck and how to get families out of some kind of heavy, heavy descriptions and feelings and so on, and I think about what kind of comment might I make. I might smile a little or something, but I think about it a lot but it seems to affect what I do by just having that consciousness, that

awareness, it is something that loosens that rigidity in a family and within my own thinking.

Sandy: I'm wondering, I'm thinking when you are talking about losing rigidity. I mean this is another brand of playfulness. I don't know if you use the Pratt fall. Pratt fall!

Dan: What's the Pratt fall?

Sandy: Pratt fall is on the Vaudeville stage, the sudden trip. I can remember one family that we felt like this, we didn't know how to loosen them up. We had a horrible first session and so we planned that I would go in and fix the microphone and fall off the chair, and I did. It did loosen them up for awhile. I don't remember anything else going particularly well. I know that Minuchen and Whittaker and people like that are always tripping over their mike and stumbling over their chair and cursing about all the technology of being a superstar, interviewing families and stuff like that. I don't know if I'd call that playfulness or not?

Steve M.: I know when you talked about the M. family, or whatever one was the most rigid one. Those are the kinds of things I was imagining, stumbling into the room, dropping your papers. Who knows what that family could do with that.

Sandy: Actually, that would be one thing they could deal with, especially the one that interviews them, she could have her skirt caught up. Capital L Capital H. So, if she were late, always late. That's been a pattern with the mother and father who are now divorced for

centuries. So if she comes in late with her papers flying, it would just set the father off. It might make him join. I'm not sure because he has great respect I think. It's an opportunity, it may set him off, but it's an opportunity to respond differently to that. I see. I think that once that gets going in the family they just get locked right into their pattern. He gets angry, she's late and she does whatever she does. I have no idea. But if Lynn were suddenly that person and they started to lock into their response to that she could respond differently to that and then that opens up just slightly.

Norm: You see I think that's the kind of playfulness that I really talk about. People are comics, most of us, some of us are. I can't get in and tell jokes. I mean you can tell me a great joke, I'll walk out of here and practice it for ten minutes and just when it's time to tell it, I forget it, and I go, "I'm not funny". Why can't I be funny although my wife sometimes thinks I'm funny but that's just because I'm absolutely silly.

Steve M.: I think there's more subtle ways to be playful and that's fine and I think of just those kinds of things as being very playful.

Norm: What it does is just change a set of expectations ever so slightly and who knows when it's going to change it enough to open it a little bit more. If it dominates everything that you are doing, then that's a mistake, that's not right, that's not what I'm saying. But we just want to get some kind of elasticity in there, a little kind of flexibleness and if we can introduce that, I think that's

helpful to a family.

Serena: You had a comment, that she said to the father. When he started to complain about mother being late again. You had suggested that Lynn say she really appreciated how that was really helping them because it brought all the issues of the family right to the floor, they came into the session ready to work because they were really ready to get right down to what things bothered them about each other. It's a positive connotation, but it's a little tease in there, and he was sort of like taken aback, and he couldn't really respond because you can just see his head well gee, I never really thought of it quite that way before. It's like a little tease to his world view, that maybe she's really thanking her because she's really helping us here.

Norm: That's it. That's what we started to describe that the look of puzzlement that Evan used to love to see. Whenever she saw that puzzlement where somebody would reframe or send in a paradoxical directive somebody in the family would just look puzzled and you knew that you had stretched something in that system. And that's what I aim to do with playfulness, that's what I think about doing and I think that people sort of have their way of doing that naturally in groups and I think that that's something to be cultivated because it's very helpful in getting people unstuck.

Dan: So you're saying how to do that without them being standup comics.

Norm: Right. I think that's important to people. You start to think about this. I think some people sort of think well I'm not a very

playful person. I'm very straightforward and I don't joke with people and that's true but probably somewhere in their way of interacting with people is something that juggles the usual, that juggles the expected in some way that can be playful and that can be cultivated and they don't have to be that standup comic and really be that Ha! Ha! What a funny thing to say. Most people aren't like that.

Steve M.: One of the ways that I have been attempting to utilize some of these concepts since we chatted several months ago, Norm, is in the category of homework. Setting up the environmental circumstances where people would be in a position to be playful. I define that very broadly. It could be on the one hand, a father going fishing with his son, given the fact that they hadn't spent any time together in years. Setting up some conditions environmentally where they would get in a position to communicate in a different way. Likewise, having parents develop star charts, reinforcement systems that are scored and monitored by the kids in the family. It puts a sort of a fun dynamic into it. I feel that that has been somewhat successful in the past couple of months with the families.

Norm: That's helpful, Steve. Thanks! I would like to move to another area now if we might. Can we try to define what playfulness is? I know that if we had started with that, it really would have fallen flat.

Sandy: Playfulness is the definition that your committee will accept in the next few months. That's right. (A time of playfulness took

place here, not able to transcribe).

Steve M.: When we first talked about it, this is what came to my mind, and maybe we could just use it as a frame of reference. Playfulness is a way to engage the family in inter-counseling topics/directions which are consciously designed to shift the focus of communications from the intensity of a particular stressful situation to a light, fun oriented framework for the purpose of allowing temporary relief to painful emotions, and at the same time teaching the family that they are in fact capable of relating to one another in a humorous, carefree, nonconfrontational, enjoyable manner.

Sandy: That's a definition! You remember it! You just agree!

Janine: I don't think that's all of it though. Because I think there are times when it's not just to lighten the intensity, it may be to heighten intensity, but in some particular ways, and to heighten some particular patterns without making them explicit. That definition seems to me to have two pieces, one is the lightening and two is that you're making it more explicit to families and I don't think that's always the case. I think there will be times we would be using playfulness to make things more intense and for them to experience something different in a right brain sort of way, not necessarily being aware in the left brain or what it is they are experiencing. So, I would want to expand on it, I guess, to include that.

Dan: This is a technique. Are we talking about a therapeutic technique; playfulness is a therapeutic technique which does the following. It is aimed at accomplishing some therapeutic goal.

Serena: I think because it's a word that's used other places and has a more general meaning, a more generalized meaning in the language and culture, we might want to start with that meaning and then go toward how that is used in therapy.

Sandy: I think playfulness is an enactment with a re-contextualization. It's going through a set of, a sequence in some kind of different frame, so that when puppies play, they act like they're fighting. But their not fighting, they're playing. They're growling, they're biting each other's ears, they're rolling around on the ground and doing all the things that doggies do when they fight, and that sort of 'it' abstract. The level at which this agreement comes and in puppies it's probably abstract, it's probably coded genetically. They probably don't get to learn how to initiate play. I'm guessing they don't, that they just can do it. But the ability to practice a sequence in an alternative set of contingencies and to do that without discussing the set, to somehow communicate that this is an alternative set of contingencies without bringing that set of contingencies down to level one to be discussed, creates the play, playful situation. As soon as you discuss the alternative set of contingencies it becomes serious again. We are in the contingencies.

Janine: So it's a way of creating a contextual difference between level one and level two. Is that right?

Sandy: It seems that symptoms can be exaggerated, they could be stopped at a different level, by a paradoxical sort of statement or a teasing about, I bet you're going to do this right now, I bet you can lift it and stuff. It may be that playfulness is also defined by the subjective experience of doing this, so that it might. I'm just guessing, but I think it might be true, for instance: If I tell a trainee when the schizophrenic son starts to babble, thank him for changing the subject, that it was getting too hot. The trainee can very seriously thank him for changing the subject. He was told to do it, thank you for changing the subject. The thing is, if that is a fairly dramatic disjunction, the trainee begins to feel playful. It begins to feel like a joke. Now, it may be that in this family that initially the laughter will reside behind the mirror. Everybody behind the mirror is cracking up, oh, what a funny thing! Ha! Ha! But eventually as that becomes a sense of a really different context, it's not something that's a bizarre vocalization by the therapist, a re-contextualizing of this mumbling. The family starts to laugh, too, and it's at the point, at this same sequence, observable sequence is happening with different experience of context that it begins to feel playful. Over and over again. Right. The playfulness comes from behind the mirror out into the front of the mirror as they begin to experience, to share the context, and I think that was something when I was telling you earlier that I guess that's important, that it be shared in order to be playful. That it works.

Serena: It can't just be playful for the therapist, or playful for the family, it has to be something else.

Sandy: If I say so, you're going to go do it again with them, and get into the same fight, and you go how can you say that, my experience with playfulness will evaporate instantly.

Norm: I'm thinking about how to bring it to the family. In other words, your saying it has to be shared to be playful. Right?

Sandy: The shared experience of a re-contextualization of the same visible sequence, and a reaction to that. No. Just that shared experience is the definition of playfulness.

Norm: Part of what you said during our interview was that it really hangs in the structure of the communication. Is that similar to what you're saying now?

Sandy: Tell me how I said that, it hangs in the structure of communication. I'm trying to think.

Norm: It's written on your paper.

Sandy: Silence folks. It's the paper, it's being perused for the word structure. That's another way of training. I.P. interactional. Sorry. O.K.

Norm: Well, I'll just let it go, I can't remember exactly how you said it.

Sandy: Using the structure in the sense that if something is expected

to be in a certain way, both the action and the meanings of the action and it happens in a different way, it then comments on the set of meanings and it is playful, the therapist falling off the chair is playful in the sense that it changes this meta expectation of the therapeutic relationship. That I am an expert and I control things and you are the poor tortured people that I will help, and I fall off my chair. It creates a different meaning about the flow of the whole therapeutic relationship, just like it would be different if we talked to each other when Serena started talking about that you started to get uptight and furious and nervous and so forth.

Steve M.: So is it a concept or a therapeutic technique that we're talking about?

Sandy: I think playfulness is an interactive relationship. When a dog puts both feet out in front of him and puts his head down between his legs, he's proposing that we play. That's a dog saying so you want to play. You see one dog go up to the other, and do like that, and they both scoot off across the lawn. When the therapist winks, or jiggles, or says something it can be that he or she is proposing a different context for the sequence that is going to go on and that can be denied. The example that I use when I say something, and Janine gets horrified, my experience of playfulness will go away very quickly. I proposed a certain sort of relationship that she didn't want to play and so it is playful, I mean it was an attempt to be playful, but until she says yeh. Ha! Ha! Ha! It isn't playful, it's

just a proposition, if you'll pardon the term. A structured environment such that playfulness is encouraged, why don't we? The structure of playfulness is an intricate part of it, and what do you say for the next half an hour, we're going to play, we're going to get on the floor, we're going to dance or we're going to play like puppies.

Steve M.: Well, that's why I say the techniques come in though. I mean the concepts, the conceptual base would be more the kind of thing that you're talking about as far as it's an interactive process. There are certain ways that it helps you to work across levels and to give different meanings and so on, that's the conceptual basis and then there are some specific techniques by which you carry out those concepts.

Sandy: But for me, one of the techniques would not be to say now we have to play, now we go into play. I would move into it more indirectly, probably generally, I would say.

Norm: You'd invite it in other words, but if people didn't want to play then you'd just simply back off.

Sandy: If it's all totally in sequence, it's not play. If we always get mad here and we're able to re-contextualize that so that it feels differently, that's playful. But, if we say now we're all going to roll around on the floor and people are uncomfortable, that's not playful. They don't normally roll around on the floor.

Janine: So that would be an important part of the definition I think. That's not all forms of play are playful to all people. Everybody is different.

Janine: I guess that's what I'm saying about the responding. People have to respond to the invitation to play and see it as playful. Otherwise, it isn't playful. It's just in the mind of the therapist or the team.

Serena: You might want to distinguish between playful and play.

Sandy: Yes, because play could be thought of as doing some sequence that you would never normally do as taking a break from the usual sequence so that the family always has discussions and now we're going to have coloring so that this whole different sequence could be play, a break from the usual. But playful is the same sequence in a different non verbally negotiated context which we contextualize as the sequence. Play takes away the usual experience, but isn't playful. Also, it may, but it doesn't necessarily. But, if I say we are going to color now, and you think that we're here to do therapy, and start coloring, this act that we wanted to call play will not feel playful at all, as a matter of fact, it will feel more and more deadly serious. I'm paying \$50 an hour and the sucker has me coloring. I could have colored at home, really. Why am I here?

Steve M.: So play may not necessarily change the context. Is that what you're saying? At least what people usually think of as play.

Sandy: Unless you do a rigorous definition about that, because people usually think of coloring as play, but it's only playful if it is.

Steve M.: We also say that the concept of playfulness is not limited to therapeutic session extending that to home.

Norm: Absolutely, and that's a part of therapy.

Steve M.: So should that be included in the definition?

Norm: One thing I've found. It's not only a way to expand the family, but it's a way for the therapist to expand their range of behaviors. I guess it's a different way of punctuating, and one thing that I've talked about is that it's a way for the therapist to separate from the emotional field and I use it sometimes to sort of pull away from the family and see what's going on. Also to pull them away too, but I come along with them. So it is a tool for the therapist in terms of what you were talking about.

Janine: But you can't separate from interaction the fabric of theory. You're saying that playfulness can be helpful to you as a therapist. You can be playful, but not necessarily playful to the family, right?

Norm: That's true. It can happen between the therapist and his team or her team, or even in his or her own mind. I don't have a team, it's terrible.

Serena: Me neither.

Norm: So, I have this need.

Janine: I had one student who just thought it was so disrespectful that people would sometimes, when they are watching video tapes and watching the role plays and so on but especially the video tapes because those are real families that people in the class would laugh, they would chuckle, they would nudge each other and she was the most unplayful person herself, you know. Everything was very serious and it was so difficult, it would come up in class over and over again and she would blame other people in the class for being disrespectful and it was so hard to try to convince her that this was a very energizing kind of response and it wasn't just disrespect for the family.

Serena: For me I can tell the difference behind the mirror when people laugh out of disrespect or when they laugh out of their own discharge of energy and their own nervousness and their own, my God, what are we going to do! I still remember struggling with that for a year and every time I saw her it would bring it back up.

Sandy: So she's an individual therapist, now, huh?

Janine: I was just going to add something to that. Just that those sort of therapist responses, like when you laugh at a family, or information that can be fed back into the family can be used that way in teaching. Oh, you're laughing well how can we use that. That's happening in the family? And in many ways whatever happened this time in your family can be brought up to a level where everyone could be laughing or whatever.

Steve M.: And what's the effect of that plan. What's the effect of it?

Janine: I think that people don't see that and they tend to interpret it as some kind of disrespectfulness sometimes or some kind of levity that has nothing to do with what's going on in the therapy, instead of being able to relate it specifically how it's helpful to the therapeutic situation. It's really hard. You sound like that person could only think on a level one, and they were relating to what everybody was doing based on just, it's very literal. Very.

Norm: You mentioned, Janine, in our interview in the years that you've taught that course that the two things that people never mentioned about healthy families, one was playfulness and the other was taking care of the elderly in their families.

Janine: When they do papers on what is a healthy family, very few people ever mention humor and so I always point it out when I read the paper. I read excerpts of the paper back to people. And is playfulness a component of a healthy family? I say yes. Absolutely. I would think so.

Sandy: I'd say playfulness is the only thing that saves a lot of families, especially mine. To me it makes life worth living, it's that central. If you laugh a few times, it's all worth while. If we didn't have a sense of humor, we would have gone a long time ago.

Norm: What were you going to say, Steve?

Steve M.: I was just going to say, the family that plays together stays together. Like it was mentioned earlier, if it is such an important ingredient to the mental health of the individual in the family, why aren't we all more accurately involved in addressing that issue?

Sandy: That's a real good question about training too. Because mental health training is traditionally very serious, you are about to become Shaman. That's a real good model, training people to be infinitely wise and go through steps and groups and so forth so that they can be wise and make powerful interventions and fix people's lives and all other stuff and it's very horrid for them not to be pretty deadly serious especially with the responsibility that people take in that I think, the individual therapy model especially promotes that. You report to your supervisor, who reports to his supervisor, who reports to God about you know the power of transference and feelings that you're having, feelings they are having and how this, bla, bla, bla, and it's very hard to yuk it up in a situation like that. So it's really hard to promote it once you're doing therapy. And I've seen things like that trying to be promoted, it's like coloring. Now we've been talking about Jung and so forth and now we are all going to go off on a weekend and color. It doesn't teach playfulness. It teaches people to take everything seriously. The most horrible thing about the growth movement is how seriously people play. I'm

really playing now. So that you have to do it in such a way that it doesn't move into that relocation. Then it's not playful anymore. Then you can sit there joking how stupid everybody is in the groups, unless you know, if you're playful about whatever context.

Dan: It seems that people have to separate themselves half the time instead of being playful in what they're doing. Life is not playful, but to separate yourself and be playful is O.K. But it's not going to be playful during life and I think that's a big mistake that people make in training especially.

Norm: O.K. Well, I'll try to go forward with that definition, flush it out a little bit and get it accepted. I'll have to listen to it.

Sandy: Do you have a committee member here tonight?

Norm: No. That would not be kosher.

Janine: No, in fact they asked me to review his dissertation proposal and I said I can't do that, then I asked Norm, and he said it would be alright. I got some helpful suggestions. There was something else I wanted to say. Can I just get something clarified? When you say they don't want you to define it in terms of characteristics, and I'm not sure whether we've answered your questions completely. You wanted a theoretical technical. It sounds as if we have several theoretical technical pieces in there as far as what it does, who it does it for, when it does it, it has to be interactive and it has to necessarily not always be explicit. Those kinds of things so it feels like we have a chunk of that. I'm not sure we have the chunk of the

technical. That's not clear to me and I don't know if it's clear to you, it's not getting any clearer.

Norm: I feel that I could pull a conceptual kind of theoretical distinction for playfulness in therapy out of what we just talked about, but I don't have a definite sense right now. I guess I think of technical more in terms of functional definition. Maybe that's not quite what they mean but I think of it that way. How does it function? What are the functions of playfulness in therapy?

Janine: And how is that different from characteristics then?

Sandy: I'm not sure that it is entirely.

Janine: My advice is write a few definitions and see if they don't think it meets what they want. Because you never know what a characteristic is.

Sandy: What is the structure of the relationship that you would call playful? Well, do you feel that you have enough information about the functional aspects.

Norm: I think so. Do you have some other ideas that your thinking about that maybe aren't in those definitions that I listed?

Janine: I think there's a lot here. What you can do maybe is combine some of these briefer descriptions into the functional way that they work using these adjectives, but making them more specific about ways that they work. Hooking this together and tie this to specific times in the therapy when you might use them or who they work for in

the therapy. I think a lot of specifics.

Serena: Along the line of what you're saying, perhaps, some type of assessment inventory of playfulness responses that people have, that families have typically utilized. So you have some outright assessment of what they do to be playful. If there is a kind of absence of any playfulness in the family that would be something that would be useful information to add.

Sandy: To invite it or to elicit it, that seems to be useful information. So if someone's playfulness is going to Riverside Park as a family or someone going to the Berkshires to listen to love music. If that's playful. It may be playful, or it may be deadly serious. We have to do cultural events. Let's be together, we'll all ride the roller coaster. I could remember Sunday drives. Happy families go for drives. Oh, good! And then they have dinner at three o'clock on a Sunday. Well, those are forms of play, but they may not be playful, and so I think of giving those as examples that might invite playful responses but that might not be playful for people at all. And in the therapy I think of different ways of reframing, paradoxing. I mean those are ways to invite playfulness, in fact, whether it's a playful interaction or not, is again only defined by the people.

Serena: That would be like hitting on the family assessment, something that playfulness elicited--such as writing the executive function and the clarity of communication and all those kinds of things. You had a heading on playfulness. Who initiates it? Who's most responsive?

Who's least responsive? What kinds of playfulness do they show? That would really help you in your treatment plan in a way that we don't usually organize.

Janine: But you'd also have to include a component of, I think playfulness can also be very dysfunctional in families. I think of a case that you worked with. The father was a real jokester and the mother was really struggling with these two youngsters. They would take their meals from the table, and put them and eat them in their rooms and they would leave the dirty dishes in their rooms and the mother would go and pick up the dishes and bring them out. You know the whole family was very, very splintered, and the father thought it was a big joke, so he was playful but in that particular family it was very dysfunctional. So you would have to have a way that we haven't talked about that. I've also seen playfulness in families be very dysfunctional so if you say does a healthy family have it, yes, they do, but then I'm also forced into a how can I be more clear about when it's not healthy because there are times when it is not healthy.

Norm: It seems that for it to be healthy, it has to in some kind of way be redemptive in some sense, it has to lift people out of something towards something, towards a differentness that's helpful. O.K. Maybe that's it.

Sandy: Maybe that he proposes a different relationship that she doesn't accept. The more he lightens it the more she gets dour. O.K. and

so it wouldn't be called playful in that sense. We assume that playful is agreed upon. It's mutual then it becomes part of the sequence that we need to be playful about rather than playfulness. He keeps proposing that this is a joke, that she shouldn't take it so seriously. A perfectly nice thing to do. She keeps taking it more and more seriously because he won't take it seriously.

Janine: So you are going to have to put that piece that Sandy just said in there. Find a definition somehow, Norm. But it has to have that quality to it. That's good. That same thing can happen right in the therapeutic room, exactly and you can keep trying to punctuate this thing in a playful manner and keep inviting it and every time you do you legitimize the system more and more to the point of either getting them out of therapy or just having them resist you more.

Sandy: It occurs to me why systematic therapy is so unplayful too because it's so verbal because you re-contextualize verbally over and over and over again, and it's so given to verbalization. New meanings through words and playful is exactly not that. It is not taking the level, the context level, and verbally bringing it down and discussing it. It's attempting to change that contextualization, that experience, without bringing it down and discussing it.

Serena: I have a more cynical view. I think that family therapists take themselves so seriously in their new field and there trying to be the best and I have sort of a cynical way of looking at the family therapy field and they think they've developed everything new and it's

not and is playfulness allowed in that. But Manuchin and Whittaker are really playful.

Sandy: If you go to AMFT. There are the funny ones and the not funny ones. Yeh. It really falls out. There is this whole crew of people; Howie Little and Dick Schwartz, and all these people who are just yukking it up all the time and goofing around and then there are the you know, very, very serious people, exactly the kind of folks you are talking about. And that probably has something to do with the way they're trained as well.

Steve M.: I think we should get families that aren't playful and get them to join the YMCA and bring their kids with them and get in the pool and play together, and then monitor, and structure, an audience reaction, encourage them to interact, wrestle, love, and those types of things.

Norm: I'm watching the time for you more than you. I'm concerned that we'll get into something and you'll want to stop. Do you have any questions, or other comments or suggestions for me at this point?

Sandy: I would like you to remember Norm, that the farmer that sells his rooster has his reasons. Is that the same as why did the chicken cross the road? Ultimately, I think probably. You don't want to bring it down now, do you? Does anybody have any comments?

Steve M.: Yeh. I'd like to see you finish this dissertation by August 15th. O.K. Everybody all in agreement.

Dan: It depends if it helps or hinders you.

Norm: Well that's got to help me. That's the day my baby is due.

Serena: God, why do people have babies while their writing dissertations? I don't know.

Sandy: It's a way to play, I guess. I did. It was great. It forced me to get it done.

Summary

Both the interviews and seminars were helpful methods of investigation for this study.

The interviews provided time to explore, indepth, with each family therapist the specific questions and goals of this study. The discovery of new ideas and issues could be addressed as they arose and as notions began to crystallize it was easier to formulate additional questions and directions. Each interview enriched the following one and clarified ideas obtained during previous interviews. More data was obtained as the study progressed.

The seminar was a forum for the therapists to come together, having read a summary of their own interview and a listing of responses to the questions from all six therapists. The impact of our interviews was discussed with new ideas and case examples. A consensus of ideas which led to a definition of playfulness was reached during the seminar in a playful building together of notions and examples.

In the following chapter the synthesis of finding will be presented.

CHAPTER V

SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter is organized into three sections. The information presented was obtained from the interviews which were conducted with each family therapist and the seminar which was held after all the interviews were completed.

The first section contains the definition of playfulness which was agreed upon for this study, forms of playfulness that were identified by the six family therapists and cautions regarding the use of playfulness in Problem Solving family therapy. Although this section's organization appears as if it proceeded in this fashion as the study progressed, we actually arrived at this organization through different discussions which were interactive over time.

The second section contains observations which were discussed about the impact of playfulness on the family's interaction. Observed behaviors are reported with some discussion provided about the importance of these behaviors to the mental health and well-being of the family.

The last section of this chapter contains a theoretical discussion of the impact of playfulness on the therapeutic process of change from a systemic communicational perspective. This section may initially sound remarkably different to the reader because the ideas and constructs are presented in Systemic Communications language.

This last section also contains a second discussion about being cautious about playfulness from a Batesonian systemic perspective. It was thought that presenting it here might improve the clarity of ideas by minimizing the switching back and forth between language systems. The flow seemed to be smoother.

Synthesis

This chapter is an attempt to integrate the data gathered from the interviews and seminar into a definition and explication of playfulness as it arises in Problem Solving Family Therapy. The sequence will track the evolution of our thinking from the first conceptualization, offered as a primer, to our final consensual approximation (which may be refined in further studies).

When the family therapists were first invited to participate in this study of playfulness, their acceptance of the invitation implied an understanding of the word and concept. However, not one of them ever previously identified playfulness as an aspect of their style of therapy. They had never thought of it as entering into their work in any way. Nevertheless as the study progressed, they all began to notice its occurrence and indeed found themselves deliberately trying to introduce it into their therapeutic practice. By the time we met in the seminar their awareness and experience of playfulness were preceived by all involved to be richly augmented. Still, an accurate and inclusive definition of playfulness proved to be quite elusive, and we came to understand full well why no adequate definition appears in the literature.

Arriving at our consensus involved a good deal of Hard Work (with thanks to Winnie The Pooh).

Our quest began with the "beginning concepts" that were presented to the therapists at the beginning of the first interview as a preliminary sketch of the phenomena to be addressed:

Playfulness - it may be humorous, ironic, whimsical, or pleasurable. It has a transformational capability that can create sudden affective shifts, introduce positive affect and upset expectations of seriousness or doom. It implies a different frame of reference, a different attitude toward content and invites different actions, attitudes and assumptions.

These concepts were helpful for focusing our discussions as we tested them against experience and added new dimensions. Clearly playfulness is primarily--both initially and fundamentally--an attitudinal set characterized by lightheartedness, humor, spontaneity, whimsey and impulsiveness, usually conveying a tone of warmth and affection. In order for it to have its greatest effect, of course, it must be expressed in action, perceived by others, and become the nature of the interactions that follow through some sort of agreement among the participants.

The process of reaching this agreement appeared to us to have some rather particular components. First of all, the initial expressions of playfulness which constituted an invitation to participate in such activities is seldom, if ever, an explicit verbal message (Even the invitations of Cloe Madens, "Let's pretend", are not directly proposing, "Let's be playful"). Such explicit, fully conscious, and deliberate attempts to generate playfulness usually fall prey to the typical rules,

routines, and patterns of rigid and fixed determination from which we are trying to get away (domination of the "left brain," if you will). We would expect that deliberate attempts to instill playfulness would be no more helpful than any other "Be Spontaneous" injunction. Successful invitations to playfulness appear to be much more implicit, subliminal, para-verbal, or non-verbal signals of an inclination to take a different set or address to matters at hand. Such signals are found in tone of voice, turn of phrase, "twinkle in the eye", or other non-verbal behaviors that are as quickly understood in a culture as various sounds and nips are comprehended by a pack of playful puppies who are then able to "fight" exuberantly without hurting each other.

If the invitations are perceived and responded to in kind, a playful interaction emerges which signals an implicit agreement or contract that such activities are now appropriate, expected, and preferred. This agreement or contract can be seen as establishing a new and distinctly different context, with its own new rules, shape, boundaries, acceptable patterns of interaction, and limits. As this re-contextualized interaction continues, spontaneous, novel, impulsive, and unpredictable behavior replaces the old fixed predictable patterns governed by established rules, roles, and routines. "Anything predictable is therapeutically inefficient" (Palazzoli, 1981). In this process the context itself continues to evolve: rules become more flexible, boundaries and limits are moved back, and there is a suspension of concern for consequences and an absence of judgements of good and bad or right and wrong. This liberates the participants from the bonds of old patterns and appre-

hensions and generates a context that invites the free play of whimsey, imagination, and creativity.

The more fully these kinds of activities are engaged in, the more other kinds of consequences emerge. Affect abandons grim seriousness and shifts to delight and pleasure. In the fun of the playfulness antagonisms are replaced by affection, competition is replaced by comedy, and new forms of relationship can spring forth. Since this is clearly something that the participants are creating themselves, with each other, together, a very new and significant experience of unity can contribute to underlying feelings of pride and joy.

In more conceptual terms this re-framing of the context leads to a re-experiencing of content and a re-construing of meanings--old problems and patterns may never seem the same again, at least those that have been transformed by playfulness. On one level many transformations may have taken place, but the most significant change may be a meta-transformation--that is, a transformation in the way other transformations are likely to happen.

In summary, a definition of playfulness is offered which attempts to synthesize the foregoing discussion into a single--cumbersome-- sentence.

Playfulness is an attitudinal set characterized by light-heartedness, spontaneity, and humor which when fully shared by all participants generates transformations of behaviors, meanings, and consequences, purposes, perceptions, and processes in ways that free the participants from fixed, rigid (pathological) patterns and enhance the generation of novel modes of interaction and relationship.

The attitudinal set appears to originate in any participant who signals para-verbally and non-verbally an invitation to others to join in this suspension of habitual rules and expectations and co-generate a context for whimsical improvisation and unpredictable spontaneity. Response in kind from other participants signals an agreement to experiment with this novelty. Ensuing interactions transform and are transformed by different rules, routines, expectations, affects, meanings, limits, perceptions, and patterns. When the participants co-generate a "difference that makes a difference" (Bateson 1972 p. 271-272) therapeutic change occurs. The more profound therapeutic change is a meta-transformation, the transformation of the ways the family accomplishes other transformations.

The joy which is experienced through laughter helps us get in touch with a sense of vitality, and this vitality has great potential for things to be different. A degree of hope is born, and belief in possibilities which were not evident previously emerge.

Let us now turn to some of the forms of playfulness which we recognize in our family therapy work.

Discovery of Forms

After considerable discussion regarding the initial concepts of playfulness with each family therapist, specific and unique forms or methods of being playful were recognized. This section will provide the reader with a summary of our discussions prior to identifying specific forms and then the major forms will be discussed with case examples

interwoven in an effort to provide clarification.

We recognized that the idea of playfulness as part of the therapeutic process might be rejected by some therapists. To combine a degree of levity with such a serious endeavor as therapy is on the surface almost sacreligious. Yet, we found that laughter and tears, though extremely different emotional responses, are mutually compatible. To laugh and yet be concerned are not antithetical. Combined with a sincere reverence and acceptance of the family's present emotional set this can include an invitation or proposal for playfulness. Playfulness does not deny sadness or seriousness but in fact, complements them in consideration of the total picture of a family. Together they provide the balance that matters in keeping a clear perspective on life.

The ability to shift from the serious to the playful and to maintain the balance that focuses our hope is something that we have seen in some of history's greatest figures. Prior to reading to his cabinet his draft of the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln eased tensions by reading from a humorous book. Socrates, as is recorded in the Apology, faced his accusers and realizing that his fate was death, made a proposal to them about his penalty which was clearly playful. The penalty he suggested was entertainment for life at the Prytaneum, a dining hall for distinguished citizens in Athens maintained at public expense (Apology, 36E). In both situations it seems that playfulness and seriousness combine to strengthen each other.

Playfulness and laughter may also be the natural expression of deep emotional hurt. Such hurt may be overwhelming at times and this can

create a fear in families which is absolutely terrorizing. The ability to laugh in the face of such anguish may be a way that our minds lift us from such helplessness. Acknowledging that these extremes are compatible, a fuller appreciation of the wide range of human responses can be gained. Playfulness does not exclude being concerned and may in fact communicate a deeper appreciation and belief in the family's capability to respond.

As we began to identify specific means of being playful we recognized that its transformational character created an evolving system of interaction with the family and amongst ourselves. Therefore we expect that many other forms will be discovered as our understanding and awareness increases. The categories of forms in this study are therefore offered as those which were most frequently encountered by the therapists interviewed for this study. They are as follows: Humor and humorous dialogues, paradoxes, absurdities, irony, nicknames, and allegory, metaphor and storytelling.

Humor

This was the most familiar form of playfulness identified by the therapists interviewed for this study. All felt that there were times during the therapeutic process when they were humorous. The intentionality of being humorous was not strategic yet it was recognized that it eased tension in the family, and made the therapists themselves feel liberated and more creative.

Word Play

The most common type of humor was word play which has been referred to as paronomasic. One variety of this is the pun and unless there is a language barrier it is easily recognized. As with all word play, the opportunity to formulate a pun comes from the dialogue with the family. Mixing the sequence of words is another example that can be readily interjected during the usual give and take of the conversation. Sometimes the mixing may only be the first letter of a couple of words, such as "wixing mords". At other times an entire phrase or sentence can provide the sudden unexpected shift which creates the smile or laugh. The running on the meaning is a form which has to do with saying or expressing or acting out meanings that are slightly different from the ways that are accepted and legitimate to the family. "May I take your coat" may be quickly corrected to "May I hang your coat up for you? I don't want to take your coat, it probably wouldn't fit me anyway". It is some expression where the meaning is slightly different and where being playful with it illuminates the difference.

Implicit in word play is the idea that mistakes are made, that they are common to all of us and one way to look at them is to laugh.

The effects of humorous word play seems to be a lowering of defensiveness and the willingness to expose those dysfunctional interactional patterns within the family. The family is usually more able to be themselves in the therapy expressing their differences more openly and with some sense of commitment to work things through. An appreciate and ad-

miration develops for the quickness and lightheartedness of the participants. This builds a positive experience with some trust and willingness to risk being different.

Words are made very different in connotation by the tone of voice and by the look in one's eye. There are things that can be said with a smile, but which cannot be said, without offense, with a straight face. And once the humor has been introduced into the relationship it can be brought up again later by any member of the family or therapeutic team. In fact, when it is brought up again, the presentation may be quite different, this time with a straight face. And this may evoke even more of a humorous response.

Teasing, joking and quick one liner comments may also cause a smile or laughter. When teasing or joking, caution must be exercised, for it must be understood and remembered that humorous word play also depends upon the tying together of ideas. It is not simply the specific application of a word to a sequence that creates its meaning. It is the context within which it is presented and the associations that the family will make from it. The context of the therapeutic relationship is one of caring and this must be reinforced throughout the process. Otherwise, hurt and distrust can result.

Dr. Maxner finds that introducing humor into the family therapeutic context in a respectful and reverent way can minimize the possibility of being misunderstood. This is accomplished with a sensitivity for the family's specific pain and the issues within which this pain is couched. He finds that families are able to either accept the invitation or re-

ject it without feeling resentful of the proposal.

With a humorous invitation that communicates to the family that its predicament is a common one there is usually an accompanying friendly spirit. This friendly spirit may reinforce the caring and say this is a situation which we may all face and your response is perfectly understandable and acceptable. Let's look at it this way too (the humorous aspect) and we can laugh about ourselves.

Mr. Gross presented an example of a humorous statement that tied together a common phrase with the central issue facing the family. The family tension had been mounting for several sessions and it was apparent that the family's disengagement from each other was central to their problem. At one point Mr. Gross, the therapist, asked the mother and the daughter to discuss a conflictual issue which they had been alluding to during the session. When they began to speak to each other it was as if they were on opposite sides of a canyon unable to hear each other or articulate clearly. Suddenly, Mr. Gross jokingly said, "Long Distance Costs More". The mother chuckled and the daughter laughed. This prompted the therapist to move them closer to each other and the quality of their interaction improved dramatically. They continued to discuss the issue with each other and took some initial steps toward the resolution of this difficulty. Mr. Gross also felt that this was a turning point in the therapy since each successive session found the mother-daughter dyad seated next to each other while the whole family became more involved in the therapy.

Dr. Maxner has used jokes at the beginning of sessions to reduce

tensions, to gain control, and to refocus the family on to important issues. It seems to work in a way that distracts their anxiety and increases their willingness to be in the therapy. A family presented itself in his waiting room arguing without a concern that anyone else might be listening. Yet, their affect had changed completely by the time they came into his office. He saw this as anxiety which had been created by the impasse in their argument related to the family's rules about allowable affect when conflict is unresolved. He asked them if he could tell them a joke which was on his mind and that he just felt like sharing because he felt they could use a little laugh. They consented and were able to appreciate the humor. They all smiled or laughed to some degree after hearing the joke. With new lighter affect in the system he saw their rigid emotional set as somewhat replaced so he refocused them to the conflict they were experiencing in the waiting room. The family was open to this and so the reenactment was quickly brought into the session and Dr. Maxner was able to intervene at the moment. The family had also recieved on the meta level a means of breaking through the emotional rigidity surrounding their conflicts which could be used in the future.

Dr. Bannish says that quick one liners are spontaneous for him and that when he is in a lighthearted, playful mood he is more likely to be quick witted with a family. He feels that playfulness loosens his associations and has helped him and the family become more creative. In one family the couple's only means of communicating with each other was to talk through their children. Dr. Bannish sat on the floor and echoed

alternative responses as if speaking for each child while keeping the conversation within the child subgroup. The children began to laugh at his statements which were sometimes irrelevant and sometimes reflections about the confusion of what it is like to have someone tell you something that you think is really directed toward someone else. The listening parents initially smiled until it was each one's respective turn to speak and when things were reversed the insight was almost immediate. Dr. Bannish felt that because it was presented in a light manner, non confrontative and through the children it was most effective. The parents began to look at each other when they spoke and Dr. Bannish stayed on the floor talking to the children. He asked the parents to decide who was going to talk first when he got back to this chair. Whenever they tried to reengage the children, he told the parents not to mind his conversation with the children and to just go on talking to each other. This continued for about five more minutes, and when he returned to his seat the couple was able to talk directly to each other for the remainder of the session, appropriately leaving the children out of their conversation.

Humor is a powerful means of communicating different reality models and offering a family alternative rules about their interaction. Humor reframes the affective possibilities of an interactional sequence and helps a family become aware of its capacities to choose. Rigid reality descriptions are experienced in a new lighthearted affective frame. The experience of laughter seems to alter their attitude and this provides them with a different frame of reference with which to approach

their problems.

Paradox

A paradoxical directive in essence is a counter paradox to the family's natural paradoxical bind. Counter paradoxes are offered by introducing contradictory ideas which disrupt a rigid pattern of interaction; by relabeling or by presenting positive connotations for the family's behavior. It distracts the family from its logical and usual process of thought and demonstrates to them that their descriptions are not the sole representations of reality. The recognition of a paradoxical situation suggests that life is full of paradoxes and that our efforts to avoid them are futile. The counter paradox creates dissonance for the family and seems to provoke creative efforts to change and resolve problems.

Paradoxical injunctions or directives are common for the family therapist. To some extent the therapists that were interviewed either thought about family paradoxical predicaments or designed interventions of a paradoxical nature aimed at helping a family move through or resolve its rigid problems.

Playfulness may even be seen as a paradoxical intervention if one considers the position originally proposed by Gregory Bateson. The message that playfulness seems to communicate on the meta level is "Ignore this message" because "we're just playing" (Bateson, 1977) and therefore this is not to be taken seriously, both as a mode itself and those messages it frames. Being playful comments about something or

some context or some relationship which does not exist. Bateson states: "We face two peculiarities of play: (which he does not differentiate from playful) (a) that the messages or signals exchanged in play are in a certain sense untrue or not meant; (b) that which is denoted by these signals is non-existent" (Bateson, 1972:183). In either case it makes a statement and then disqualifies itself. Therefore whatever is said does not have to be corrected so that the family cannot disqualify it because it has already been discounted by itself. Therefore it is heard!

The playfulness evolves in the difference from another implicit expected attitude and its lack of maintaining the expected and acceptable order that the family holds. The playfulness provides a means for combining two realities which may not be normally associated with each other. This then raises the question of whether or not a sequence of behavior will always have the same results and/or the same affective component. Since it suggests that it is not inevitable, this suggests alternatives and the possibility of alternatives.

Playfulness as paradox then allows for change to be looked at but does not have to be taken seriously. It heightens the tension around the recognition of assumptions that lock a family into dysfunctional patterns. And because of this it challenges a rigid view in such a way that it is not easily forgotten.

Ms. Bloomfield sees paradox as a playful way to cut through pretensions that cause families to take themselves too seriously. The sudden surprise of identifying those pretensions about their behavior

when playfully framed becomes laughable and allows them to gracefully abandon them and move on.

Mr. Gross gives an example of a paradoxical intervention in which playfulness framed the interaction. In a family of "overextenders" where everyone worked so hard and so much that they never saw each other he coined the phrase "working off the clock." This described the behavior of the identified patient whom he saw as working hard to keep the family and bring it back together. It defined their hard work as those behaviors which were intended to improve the family and keep it together. Despite their efforts, the opposite was happening and their daughter had been hospitalized for psychotic treatment. This phrase then illuminated the paradox of their life together and also allowed them to see the truth which directed their behavior. By providing the paradox playfully, they could see her behavior as just another extension of their commitment to each other but which was also tearing them apart. The family's value of hard work was identified as a way to allow them to see themselves as they felt they were. They were working in the service of each other, it was not turning out as they intended, but they were now able to hang on to their value and redirect their behavior so that they could be more effective and continue their growth in the family life cycle.

Dr. Blount discusses another paradoxical directive that he gave to a family. The family had developed a systemic notion of what was happening. One member was saying to the others, "this is how this situation affects me and this is how I want to change". This was a move to a more interactional definition of the problem. At that point the I.P.

spoke up and said, "I don't know what's going on here, I am the one who is sick." Dr. Blount immediately turned to him and said, "That's right, and if anyone for a minute tries to take away your status, we'll all fight to the death to protect you as the patient in this family." He went on to thank the I.P. for protecting the family from others looking at things differently by holding on to the role of patient. The family had begun to reset their definition of the problem by seeing it interactionally. When the I.P. resisted this change, Dr. Blount, instead of resisting him, acknowledged the need behind his statement by siding with his view to heighten its contrast to the evolving systemic understanding. This playful interchange elucidates the paradox by connoting his behavior as a positive difference. He was able to provide them with an avenue of escape from it and disqualify any negative view of the I.P.'s attempt to restabilize the family with him as the I.P. It suprised everyone, the incongruities were clear and an alternative view of the son's statement was proposed. The parents smiled and were able to support their son without relinquishing their systemic view.

Absurdity

Making statements in an exaggerated form often makes them more memorable. It is common to hear people refer to an unbelievable story as a Texas tale, and it is frequently more apt to be remembered when in this form. In family therapy this is often an effective means of punctuating a particular point. Deliberate exaggerations are good examples of what may at times be necessary to break a family through their

deeply ingrained obtuseness. Absurd statements exaggerate an aspect of a family's behavior which is contradictory in some fashion and which we want to illustrate. Sometimes an absolutely preposterous statement is more apt to make the point where a milder presentation would not have been successful. One family was asked to write down their family secrets, each member separately, and then to put them in a box of spaghetti and freeze them in the freezer. Absurd, yes, yet emphatically clear! Whittaker (1975) proposed that absurdities effect a radical dissolution of the rationality supporting a particular cognitive posture.

Absurdities, as with paradoxes, provide a connection which is not anticipated, yet in some ways seems absolutely valid when it is presented. Robert Frost (1962) once said, "The coupling that moves you, that stirs you, in an association of two things that you don't expect to be associated."¹ This coupling can produce a touch of lightheartedness and provide the shift in view necessary to open the family system. It seems to break through the rigid rational patterns of thought and help a family access those more nonrational spontaneous aspects of life. Whittaker (1976) writes, "When we try to act reasonably, we deny our personhood . . . as we struggle to 'be' who we are, it is impossible to stop acting . . . we are both tragic and farcical. The Janus mask is thus our absurdity." (p. 10)

¹Frost, Robert. "Between Prose & Verse", in the Atlantic Monthly January 1972, p. 52.

As in any form of playfulness, absurdities are employed to help clarify and/or expand meanings. They are not intended to hurt the family, but instead the playful context protects them through its own self-disqualifying ability. This allows them to accept or reject this playful proposal. Absurdities may serve to interrupt the rigid and paralyzing emotional set to which a family clings by facilitating a truce between our idealized world and reality. We can chuckle at ourselves and allow some of our integrity to dissolve. We feel less conflicted by the contradiction in which we all live.

Dr. Blount provided an illustration that took the form of a funny mistake that daringly crystalized the problem. The family session was impenetrably serious despite numerous attempts to break through. After having consulted with his team behind the mirror, he returned with the idea that some action, on his part, was necessary to cut through this mood. As he went to sit on his chair, an absurd action flashed through his mind. He purposely sat on the edge of the chair and slid off onto the floor. The family laughed at this absurd behavior and the tension broke. His action was impulsive and had no apparent connection to the content of the session. It provided a different affective mood into the family session and this shift provided the message that other shifts were possible and allowable.

Irony

Irony that is playful attempts to provide a sharp insight through the presentation of an understatement or opposite position. It is not

meant to ridicule anything anyone has said or done. It is different from sarcasm which seems to be more of a slap in the face and more cutting. Where irony seemed well used by the family therapists that were interviewed, sarcasm was only mentioned once, and it was thought that it should be used sparingly, if at all.

A statement that is the reverse of what you might expect may have a clarifying effect. When a statement is reversed and exaggerated, people seem to hear what is wrong or what is not the case. This often illustrates the different position and increases retention of what is or what should be.

A son in a family of four never received praise for his efforts and achievements. As the oldest of the two siblings, his work performance was expected to be high, but his parents just could not afford him a compliment. During our third session we found out that he had made the basketball team, made the Honor Roll, and been accepted to college. This information was obtained only through the therapist's consistent questioning. Once the information was out, the therapist turned to the son and said, "Just a minute, what are you trying to do? Be successful? You had better be careful, or your parents may be proud of you!" With that the mother began to cry with pride and went over and hugged her son. His father got up and shook his hand congratulating him. The opposite meaning of the statement came through and it provided an opportunity for the parents to express their pleasure and learn that such expression was appropriate and rewarding. This was irony playfully employed.

Dr. Blount discusses the Socratic method for training family therapists and irony is a central feature to that method. It is also applicable to the therapeutic process as well. In the Socratic style, Socrates demonstrated his humility, either contrived or real and became the eager learner. The teacher poses questions back to the students, as if he were the learner busy inquiring about the subject. He poses logical thoughts to be examined and the students, in our case the family, find themselves challenged and involved in an ironical situation of teaching the teacher. Socrates then seemed to lead his students along until the position in question exhibited its own illogicalness or internal absurdity. When people reach this point they usually smile rather than laugh.

This author utilizes this method of questioning with families at points where they are clearly interested in taking charge of the therapy session. It becomes a way of remaining in charge by allowing the family to take control. It allows the family the opportunity to discover the assumptions that underline their behavior while also providing for the introduction of new ideas. This suggests alternatives and gives the family the experience of participating together in the development of their own alternatives.

When irony is combined with circular questioning it seems to relax the family, as Dr. Blount has suggested and elicits more spontaneity and participation. A more complete description of this will be discussed in the section on when and why playfulness is used. (p. 137)

Nicknames

Nicknames are sometimes given to family members by other family members which edify a particular aspect of that person. These nicknames may be affectionate titles or carefully teasing in nature. They are inherently playful and so can be used most effectively. Usually the therapist does not initiate this but rather picks up the opportunity from the family. Ms. Bloomfield has found that it becomes a little like a Southern style of teasing or like a game of cat chase mouse. When the therapist suddenly employs a family nickname and uses it sparingly it allows the therapist to dip in and out of the family's unique interactional identity. This can have the effect of expanding the context to include new members (in this case the therapist) and at times reframe the context when the name is used slightly different from how the family initially utilized it. This is usually a positive reframing of that person's behavior, a desirable difference which invites new interactions.

When the family's "Sassy Sandra", whose criticalness was seen as so destructive by the family, offered a sassy comment concerning the family's lack of involvement with each other, the therapist replied, "Now Sassy Sandra, that sure sounds like the voice of experience talking." She hit the nail on the head and it was punctuated in a jovial manner and with a positive use of her nickname to infer that she could be seen differently.

Allegory and Metaphors

The therapists that identified allegory & metaphors presented them as indirect ways of providing comparisons which provided understanding or connections between ideas in the family's life to those in the allegory or metaphor. Telling a story of any type generally allows the listener a certain distance from the specific message which he alone can control. In this way he/she is safe to draw these parallels within his/her own mind and decide what response if any he/she might make to them. The telling of a story or the metaphor is often felt to be more of a lighthearted experience that allows the listeners to be passive and even disinvolved or entertained in a sense. The lightness seems to lend itself to increasing a family's receptiveness and increase their readiness to change. Being able to listen from a distance provides a type of illusion of choice. They may choose not to actively apply the central idea(s) to their own lives yet their listening creates the potential for setting the stage for later change. The experience on one level is enjoyable and the family experiences this being together as pleasureable. Yet the association may create some internal (within the family) tension which moves them to respond differently. When the central themes do ring true to the listeners, there is the potential for changing their expected sequences or patterns of interactions. And because stories are often slightly exaggerated or made interesting by the story teller, the likelihood that it will be remembered is greater. When humor is a part of the allegory or metaphor this also seems to in-

crease its impact on the family.

Most of the therapists who identified utilizing this form of playfulness reported that they tended to use it more intentionally to draw the family into the therapy through the children. Therefore they tended to direct the telling of the story to them while the parents listened. Dr. Blount feels that he can be more spontaneous in story telling with children. When the children are more playful in the room, they will say and do things which are out of the usual behavioral repertoire that they might intend to show. Then the therapist can use what they saw and so as behavior or meanings that can be incorporated in the therapeutic process because they now come under the category of legitimate things to say and do.

Dr. Bannish discussed a case where the identified patient was an encopretic child. He asked the little children to sit on the floor, then told the parents that he was going to tell the children a story. The story was actually for the entire family. He told of a family of squirrels where the mother squirrel kept helping the skinniest squirrel gather nuts for the winter. She did this in a way that no one else knew about because the father squirrel felt that the young squirrel should learn to do this on his own like all the other squirrels. Despite the mother's good intentions the skinny squirrel kept leaving the nuts that she found for him in the wrong place so that everyone else, especially the mother kept finding them. They were all quite frustrated and every time the father squirrel would catch his son not looking for nuts, he would chastise him and send him out hunting. Mother and Dad

would agree that he was not doing his work or learning to gather food for the winter. The sister and brother squirrels saw that he needed help so they taught him where to look and how and where to store them. Mother was freed from the task and the skinny squirrel learned to take care of himself.

The idea of telling the story while the children sat on the floor was a fun kind of thing to do. The kids loved the story and everyone became engaged. Dr. Bannish attempted to provide a symbolic message to the family which represented a systemic epistemology for understanding the presenting problem. It did not intend to suggest an exact parallel or a solution to their situation. And the interactional representation was offered in a relaxed and playful forum.

Recognizing forms and understanding how these are playful was exciting because it clearly identified its presence in our work. Yet we knew that we were not playful at all times and we began to wonder when do we use it. Can we identify specific situations where playfulness was useful? And can we make some statements which might lend themselves to some generalizations about when to use it in our future work?

The following section addresses these issues with an attempt to present case material wherever possible.

When and Why Playfulness Was Used

Once we discovered specific forms of playfulness we turned our attention to those situations in which we were playful. We attempt here to identify some generalizations regarding when to be playful and why

being playful might be helpful in these situations. We do not intend to imply that this list is complete, for each therapist has a unique style which combines with whatever interaction the family presents at the moment. Therefore, we view this as an unfolding list of uses which we hope will generate many additional ideas.

1. When joining a family. This occurs to its greatest extent during the initial stage of family therapy. Yet there is often the need for further joining throughout the therapy when new members join sessions or when a member may begin to feel left out of the therapy. In any case this phase of the therapy has been referred to as the greeting or getting to know the family stage. By understanding it as a social stage, we realize the efforts involved in getting a family to feel comfortable by extending to them a sense of courtesy, and acceptance. Playfulness is seen as a means of helping a family to relax and a way of breaking through the professional helping posture which frequently produces defensiveness in the family.
2. When children are present in the therapy. With children present it is easier to be more spontaneous and to introduce a playful attitude to the entire family. Being playful with children is like speaking their language. They are familiar with being playful and find it comforting to be able to express themselves in a context which allows and encourages them to be spontaneous. It gains their trust quickly and seems to relax parents' efforts to maintain control of their children in this setting.
3. When adolescents are presenting in a sarcastic mocking fashion.

They seem to be quite receptive to the invitation to banter playfully with the therapist. This can provide a way to keep them off balance and more engaged in the therapy. They feel more comfortable and trusting knowing that they can express their sarcasm with someone who is willing to play the sarcasm game.

4. When the family resists the therapy. The family may appear to be trying to "squirm" away from problem interaction. By being playful there is an invitation to engage with each other differently where you're changing the meaning of the situation without changing the behavior or the interaction in the behavior. If the family accepts the invitation the family must cooperate with each other and the therapist. Once this cooperation occurs it becomes easier to engage the family in the therapy because playfulness has become part of their repertoire of behaviors. The therapeutic system has expanded its definition of permissible attitudes and behaviors. Therefore its capacity to utilize playfulness in future sessions or outside of the therapy is greater. The more spontaneous the family can be without concern about being foolish or rejected the more trusting it is of the therapeutic relationship.
5. When family members are disengaged from each other and it is difficult to see them as a supportive family unit. The major interaction that they have revolves around conflict and disagreements. Playfulness can change in the therapy problems and conflicts into caring as opposed to hostility. The playful context can teach the family that they are in fact capable of relating to one another in

a humorous, non-confrontational and enjoyable manner. Since logical efforts to bring themselves together have all but been abandoned by most families in this type of situation, playfulness can restore some hope. By interacting in a playful manner they must sustain a level of faith in the interactional process and each other. If only for a brief period of time, playfulness is seen to open doorways that previously seemed closed.

6. When trying to loosen or tighten boundaries between family subsystems. While subsystems are necessary within a family so that appropriate differentiation exists, each subsystem must be able to have access to other subsystems for guidance, for identity and for growth. Members of a family should be able to move in and out of their respective subsystems as is necessary and appropriate. At times the boundaries between these subsystems either allows too much access so that members become over involved with each other or where they are too rigid and thus prevent interactions that are natural and healthy for the growth of the family. In each case dysfunctional interactions seem to develop when these situations persist for too long. Transcending these boundaries and transforming them into conducive pathways of communication can sometimes be teased out with playful interventions.

In a case where the 7 year old son was given the same privileges as his 13 year old brother, the therapists sat next to the 7 year old and talked to him as if he were the 7 year old talking to himself. He said, "Since I can do everything that my brother is doing now

and I am only 7 years old, what do I have to look forward to when I turn 13? In this way the therapist presented a reasonable dilemma for the 7 year old, addressed the age difference with regard to privileges and at the same time aligned with the teenage who felt that he did not have the privileges he deserved for his age. This playful approach identified a family problem without being critical and gave the family an opportunity to heart it together. It was presented from a point of view which they had not previously considered (that being the 7 year old complaining). This got the parents involved in trying to hlep the younger son with his dilemma and allowed the therapist to suggest giving the older son special privileges to which the younger could look forward to. Appropriate boundaries were suggested through this interaction and established specifically by parental cooperation and guidance. Trust was established through the non-critical playful invitation which addresses an obviously sensitive area for this family.

7. When the therapist gets in a rut with a family or gets bored. At these times, it's important to elicit new information. Playfulness accesses new ideas and novel ways of viewing the family's alternatives for doing things and working through problems.
8. When you want to upset incongruities between what the family is seeing and what they are saying and doing. Playfulness can break through dysfunctional patterns and be an important perturbation to change. In family therapy we are constantly looking for ways to dislodge rigid dysfunctional patterns and playfulness provides the

opportunity to risk change in a less threatening context. It is safe because it is a caring context and because it temporarily suspends those consequences which the family expects to be associated with a sequence of behavior. It may elicit right brain activity in preference to the usual activity of left brain rationalness.

9. When cultural differences seem to be interfering with the therapy. Playfulness can provide for the opportunity to abandon differences and create a cooperative relationship through a friendly spirit. Once these differences are broken through the genuine caring might be more clearly understood by the family and therapy can proceed. However, what is funny can vary across cultures.
10. When you want to cut through a family's excessive introspection which is contributing to maintaining the problem. Playfulness changes the focus from this problematic style and allows space for new experiences of being together to emerge. Once the playful interchanges occur the family has experiences in which they have been successful together. They seem less likely to return to their introspective stance so readily.
11. When the therapists want to model behavior which relieves distress in problematic situations. Distress is counterproductive for problem resolution. Therefore, temporary relief can re-channel the intense emotionalness with productive energy so that the family can return to the issue at hand. They seem to be able to manage their feelings more productively facilitating the therapeutic process. As it is modeled it also illustrates to the family a way to talk

about serious things while being playful. This shows the family that playfulness is serious and you are not asking them to give up what they are serious about. You are asking them to take playfulness and use it as a problem solving tool.

12. When engaging in circular questioning. Circular questioning is central to establishing a systemic epistemology. The therapist asks the family members to comment on the comments and possible reactions of the other members within the family. As this unfolds, the interactional sequence within the family is being acted out. This then helps the family and the therapist to understand the interactional definitions of their problems and patterns. Yet asking family members to interact in this manner, commenting about how others may be responding to statements and behaviors is often quite difficult for families. Playfulness in the form of light irony can be of great assistance in facilitating this interaction. It is something with which people are usually more familiar and with which they can engage. It relaxes them so that they learn this new way of interacting and thinking together.

Cautions About Using Playfulness

We reached the agreement in our discussions that being playful was not always necessary or desired. There is not a need for it in situations where a family is talking about serious concerns and is not using anger, sadness or any other emotion in ways that prevent them from solving problems. Here the family might be said to be behaving in function-

al ways.

However, when dysfunctional patterns arise, the desire to replace them with more effective patterns of interactions requires some change. Proposing a playful attitudinal set may be an effective intervention in most any human situation. It becomes a question of creating an appropriate form and applying it to the appropriate degree. We had identified different forms and recognized that a playful intervention with a family was merely an invitation to them which they could accept or reject.

When we think about inviting playfulness because it's helpful to the family we are challenged to maximize the likelihood that the family will accept the proposal. The degree or extent to which we are playful in our invitation is dictated by the family's situation and how they present themselves in the therapy. We do not want to offend the family's limits and uniqueness.

When a family is experiencing a reactive depression due to a death or when there is an important loss for the family, we would expect these traumatic situations to be responded to with a proportionate amount of grieving. As a therapist in this situation we want to encourage this expression and provide them with the necessary support. We do not want to shorten or diffuse their depression prematurely or show any disrespect for their grief. Proposing playfulness too early following a family loss is inappropriate and insensitive. Simultaneous with these efforts we keep watch that this depression does not become dysfunctional to the family. If it does, more than supportive action might be neces-

sary. In order for the family to grieve and sustain the functional activities of their lives they must be able to move in and out of their grief. Gradually introducing playfulness into the therapy around the family's functional areas can provide the balance necessary. Playfulness is characterized by the transformation of actions and roles. It creates its own reality which is characterized by casual reference to events. When playful, the family learns to adopt an "as if" attitude toward themselves and their situations which encourage them to explore new possibilities. A grieving family is then afforded a break from the doom and gloom of their loss and experience themselves lightheartedly. This opens their family system to different attitudes and gives them a mode of activity for moving in and out of their grief. A case example may help to illustrate this cautious use of playfulness.

After repeated efforts to save his marriage of 10 years, a grieving young salesman entered therapy with his children with the stated purpose of getting their lives back on track. Within the first few sessions it was the therapist's impression that this young man had been depressed for several months and he was beginning to have difficulties at work. His relationships with his family (parents, siblings, and children) were empty and he spent most of his time alone. He seemed to be locked into a self debasing attitude of guilt and remorse. As he started to talk again about how badly his former wife had treated him, the therapist asked him to be specific. His helplessness was so dominant that it seemed as though the incidents that he spoke of were happening in the present. The therapist asked him if he thought that she was

finished punishing him. With tongue in cheek, the therapist carried on a serious and long monologue of questions related to his associations about his wife's mistreatment of him. Could she possibly do any more to disturb his life and did she have other plans to continue her torturous behavior. As he brought his monologue to a close he said, "I think she's trying to punish you by sending you to therapy." The salesman smiled and responded by saying, "She did not send me, I came here by my own choice." Then he paused and said in a much stronger tone, "Then why am I suffering so much?" He seemed to realize his own self-torturing attitude and this playful framing was gentle enough to reveal this to him without offending him. He began immediately planning to take charge of his life in a constructive way. He continued in therapy for five more sessions and was able to move in and out of his grief while projecting confidence that he was putting his life back together. The therapist increased his proposals of playfulness. The salesman responded with acceptance and even initiated the playful attitude on several occasions.

In situations like this a certain level of trust in the relationship is recommended. It is necessary to communicate a sincere respect for the family's pain. The way in which the situation is played upon should be beyond scorn and communicate to the family that something about their situation is a common predicament. This can give them some hope and help restore their efforts to help themselves.

A second caution regarding the use of playfulness has to do with situations where the therapist feels the impulse to make a family feel

better right away, like a "quick fix". This can happen when the therapist tries to reduce the family's anxiety level too fast. Here he may think that their emotional reaction is beyond what they can handle or he may be unable to handle the family's anxiety himself. Defusing a family's emotionality precipitously can subtract the necessary tension required for the family to remain motivated to change.

Another caution that was discussed was that the therapist must feel comfortable with being playful before he attempts to adopt this attitude in a family session. Forcing it will usually create misunderstanding and is liable to set back the therapy if not terminate it. The therapist must feel that he can move in and out of playful situations separating fact from fantasy as required and introducing differentness to the family's reality.

We must also proceed cautiously with regard to being playful when we determine a family rule which says that a particular situation or expression or relationship should not be joked about. We want to pay careful attention to these circumstances so as not to intrude into a family's sacred emotional limitations. We feel that a deep and sincere reverence must be maintained regarding a family's territorial boundaries. If they do not wish to be lighthearted about certain areas of their lives then we must comply with that request whether it be explicit or implicit. When we fail to honor their prohibitions we misuse our professional authority and more importantly jeopardize the well being of a family. We must not violate the integrity of any family.

Observations of the Impact of Playfulness on the Family

The most obvious observation was that there was a noticeable increase in laughing when an invitation to be playful was shared. Playfulness seemed to work as a catalyst for laughter, and we view laughter as an antecedent to health and happiness. Cousins (1979) feels that laughter is an antidote for painful mental states. It relaxes the hold on certain painful mental states so that other points of view and new mind states can merge. Cousins' own miraculous recovery from a serious collagen illness--a disease of the connective tissue--included intentional dosages of laughter daily. His hypothesis is that laughter contributes to the mobilization of the natural defense mechanisms in the human body. Montague (1983) says that laughter increases endorphin secretion from the brain and the pituitary gland and some of these endorphins present great similarity chemically to morphine, heroin, and other opiate substances that relieve pain by acting on the mechanism of pain itself and by inhibiting the emotional response to pain and therefore suffering. Suffering is an attitude which does not necessarily have to accompany pain. He adds that laughter also increases the immunization capabilities of the human system. With the awareness that laughter is being viewed as having these effects (and affects) we feel encouraged when we see families laughing together.

We also observed that when there is the introduction of a playful attitude there were more cases of instant mood changes. These are seen as changes in which a family moves from being stuck in a dour mood to a

lighthearted mood. They relax in a matter of moments when a playful interchange occurs. The family becomes more spontaneous with each other which allows them to be more themselves. They are more open to each other's ideas and actions as they play off each other's playful cues.

The family also seems to be more encouraging of each other which gives them the support necessary to build a cooperative spirit. Cooperation elicits caring and we learn and are encouraged to care by being cared for. The evolution of this cooperative spirit is of vital importance to us. Families have a need to belong and belong to each other. The decrease in feelings of alienation influences their willingness to work together reconstructing a positive family image.

We found that families become more active in the therapy when the playful proposal is accepted. This is evidenced by the manner in which they sit in their chairs and their willingness to accept ideas, questions and tasks. There is a renewed vitality in the family which seems to be a unifying force that collects their efforts and reminds them of why they are in therapy and why they are together as a family.

Families make statements to each other which are of a positive nature. There are more compliments exchanged and this communicates that they value each other. When valued there is an increase in trust and respect for one another's judgements and opinions.

Once playfulness is part of the therapeutic experiential repertoire, the family seems more willing to delve into more sensitive issues and risk thoughts and feelings which were previously masked.

Overall we witness an increase in the family's participation and

activeness in the therapy. We see them taking a more active role in determining directions in therapy with a concomitant degree of responsibility for their treatment. In a very real and positive sense they are more verbal about their destiny as a family together.

The Interaction of Playfulness with the Therapeutic Process of Change in Family Therapy

This section contains ideas and notions regarding the interaction of playfulness with the therapeutic process of change. It attempts to describe what playfulness does to the interaction of family members and the family therapist group that results in change. It is not intended to suggest any changes to the theory of family therapy but rather how playfulness plays a role in helping family therapy to do what the theories say it can.

This presentation begins with some paraphrased discussion from the seminar with the six family therapists interviewed for this study. The intention of this discussion is to focus the reader on the way that these therapists think about family problems. Following this discussion are the ideas and notions about playfulness and the therapeutic process of change that I abstracted from all my contacts with these therapists and my own work.

Relevant Discussion Highlights

A key shared belief in the group is that incongruities or paradoxes within a family system of communication are generated when a message at

one level (content) contradicts a message communicated at another level (context). These contradictions create problems restricting emotions and behaviors and development of the family life cycle. With functional families these paradoxes are quickly resolved. However, when a family is unable to resolve these paradoxes, they tend to formulate inappropriate and inadequate definitions about resulting conflicts and repeat various interactional patterns of the same process of problem resolution. These frustrating attempts rigidify a family's system of rules of interaction and interfere or block the process of change. In order to loosen the fixedness or stuckness of the family's problem set, a therapist needs to identify these paradoxes in communications. The next step is to introduce counterparadoxical communications which break through the family's system of logic. Once this is broken through, alternative communications interactions become available and change is more likely to occur.

In Bateson's (1955) view, in all human communications it is necessary that paradoxes of abstraction must make their appearance in all communication to transpire. He states:

Our central thesis may be summed up as a statement of the necessity of the paradoxes of abstraction . . . We believe that the paradoxes of abstraction must make their appearance in all communication more complex than that of mood-signals, and that without these paradoxes the evolution of communication would be at an end. Life would be an endless interchange of stylized messages, a game with rigid rules, unrelieved by change or humor (pp. 50-51).

The conclusions of our group fit with Bateson's view here. An outcome of our thinking is the proposal that it is at these incongruities

and paradoxes of abstraction that playfulness has its greatest impact on the therapeutic process of change.

When playfulness is introduced into the family therapeutic context it's as though a new context is being superimposed onto a familiar one. The playfulness extends the expected boundaries of therapy and the family's particular sequence of interaction. This expands the possibilities of the therapeutic relationship and proposes a different attitude for the interaction that they have just experienced and will experience in the future. In the context of playfulness, a family gets the opportunity to look at the rules of their interaction without having to follow them. This provides the family with some emotional distance from the problem set. It provides exposure to a breakdown in the logic between different abstract levels of thought. By breaking through the family's patterned process of interaction, differentness is introduced and this then becomes available for future situations.

Playfulness changes the meaning of the situation without necessarily changing the behavior or the interaction of behaviors. It has the same structure as a good punch line to a joke. It changes the meaning of what came before it rather than the data. Within the new meaning all the data fits.

Being playful with a family is seen as a way of teasing for flexibility of meanings and behavior that are slightly different from ways that have been accepted and legitimate to the family. By playing with meanings we engender flexibility and encourage other perceptions of reality. Since reality in families is something that is negotiated

and playfulness suggests flexibility, it also becomes an effective way of relating or negotiating reality. Through new realities or frames, different perceptions and actions can evolve. A flexible style is important to a family because it increases their capacities to behave differently in a variety of situations. Novel realities create a larger perspective on issues and this suggests that change is possible.

When a family accepts a playful invitation they enter into a relationship which has a degree of uncertainty and ambiguity to it. Where that interaction will lead is unclear for it is the building together of ideas marked by spontaneous action in which the family lets down its masks and in a sense its members become more themselves. The more spontaneous the players are, the less defended they are and vice versa. This promotes forms of risk taking with each other which is important for change. Bateson (1955) contended that ". . . change can only be proposed by experimental action, but every experimental action, in which a proposal to change the rules is implicit, is itself part of the on-going process." (p. 192). Playfulness creates novelty which must include experimental actions and risks which become part of the therapeutic reality and hopefully the family's on-going repertoire.

As the family and therapist join through playful interactions they are all afforded a means of moving in and out of the family's problem set. The therapist can utilize this to help him resist becoming entangled by the family's quagmire of interactions. Therefore he/she can maintain the necessary therapeutic distance through which he can direct interactions and introduce other interventions.

In summary, playful interventions are intended to affect change by cutting through dysfunctional family reality models, by reversing ideas which disrupt interactions and by taking a whimsical, lighthearted view of the human dilemma. These interventions set the tone for a flexible environment which engenders change.

A Caution About Being Playful From a
Batesonian Systemic Viewpoint

Bateson's Categories (or levels) of Learning and Communication

Zero Learning is characterized by specificity of response, which right or wrong, is not subject to correction.

Learning I (LI) is change in specificity of response by correction or errors or choice within a set of alternatives.

Learning II (LII) is change in the process of Learning I, e.g. corrective change in the set of alternatives from which choice is made, or it is a change in how the sequence of experience is punctuated.

Learning III (LIII) is change in the process of Learning II, e.g. a corrective change in the system of sets of alternatives from which choice is made . . .

Learning IV would be change in Learning III but probably does not occur in any adult living organism on this earth. Evolutionary process has, however, created organisms whose ontogeny brings them to Level III. The combination of phylogenesis with ontogenesis, in fact achieves Level IV.

Since we will be discussing our contentions regarding caution about using playfulness on Level II and Level III, a few more statements might clarify these categories.

A change in the set of alternatives elicited by a given context marker is an example of Learning II. Any change in the set of alternatives in a context or in the pattern of punctuating events into a context or of identifying context markers would be Learning II. Punctuation is the act of ordering perceived phenomena into meaningful units. Family members punctuate the same interactional series differently and therefore draw different conclusions as to what the whole interaction means.

In talking about Learning III, we are in areas of experience where words are inevitably inadequate and can even be misleading. We are trying to describe a corrective change in the sets of premises of Learning II. Bateson claims that if Learning II is a learning of the contexts of Learning I, then Learning III should be a learning of the contexts of those contexts. An abstraction at a higher level gives flexibility at a lower level. We must be describing in the term "Learning III" some abstraction which will give flexibility in the premises involved in a family's identity, or "freedom from their bondage". The system would then leave more flexibility at Learning II.

Now for our contentions about being cautious from this perspective.

We need to be cautious about using playfulness when setting the state for new meanings for a family. When we are trying to establish Level III premises, we are trying to recast the family's history in a

new way for them to understand it. We are looking to set a common ground which they will assent to. We want them to feel connected with each other so that we can introduce new meanings at Level II. The premises that we set at Level III we do not want to leave open to question because at this level they must be joined. These premises are not negotiable and are inflexible because, in an important sense, they provide the safety net that ties them together. So as we are setting these premises we do not want to communicate uncertainty or ambiguity to the family. So we must be cautious about being playful here. Once the Level III premises are set, you can set up the illogicalness of Level II premises.

In setting Level III premises we might say, "This is a family with great intensity in caring", or "this is a family that will go to any length to protect each other". In either case we are saying that ultimately "You are a family--and with great caring or protectiveness." This ties them together so whatever they are doing at Level II, this is in place, and so they are connected.

When introducing Level II premises we can feel more comfortable about being playful. For instance we can say to a family where the husband withdraws during a disagreement, "Dad keeps to himself because he knows how upsetting this can be for Mom when disagreements arise and that this is a model of self control for the children." For the assertive mother we might say, "Mom knows that it's healthy for her to release her tension, and her expressiveness is a talent that tells the family not to hide their feelings." Both aspects of relating are fine

and are realities which exist in our human experiences together. The illogicalness of this behavior at Level II with regard to resolving their problems, fences them in. And because Level III is set, their paradox becomes clear. Their behavior is benevolently framed and we usually see that they are motivated to change.

CHAPTER VI

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY, PRACTICE AND TRAINING IN FAMILY THERAPY AND A LOOK TOWARD THE FUTURE

Introduction

This chapter begins with a summary of this study.

Then an examination is presented of the implications that playfulness has for the theory, practice and training of family therapy. First, in this section, selected central features of several theoretical orientations, from which Problem Solving Family therapy derives its conceptual framework, are presented. Then ideas are presented from the therapists and the thinking of this author regarding how playfulness can expand and enrich our theoretical thinking. Next, specific therapeutic skills are discussed which can be facilitated by adopting a playful attitude and therefore impact on the therapeutic process of change. In the last part of this section, implications that playfulness has for the training of family therapists are discussed.

In the following section of this chapter, ideas and areas for future research and study are presented.

As a final section to this chapter, conclusions are presented about what we found out about playfulness in this study.

Summary

An exploratory study was conducted to investigate the presence and

use of playfulness in problem solving family therapy. Six expert informants (practicing family therapists) were interviewed separately. They then met as a group with the researcher to discuss findings and explore the impact of the interviews on their work.

We found that playfulness did exist in each therapist's style of doing family therapy. The forms identified and discussed were: humor and humorous dialogues, paradoxes, absurdities, irony and allegories, metaphors and storytelling. Sub-categories included word play, puns, mixing the sequence of words, running on the meanings, teasing, one-liner jokes, relabeling or reframing, positive connoting and reversals. Each form was viewed as an invitation or proposal to the family to be playful. These invitations were seen generally to occur on an implicit, subliminal, paraverbal or non-verbal level. Such signals may be found in tone of voice, turn of phrase of "twinkle of the eye" and are quickly understood to be playful.

We defined playfulness as an attitudinal set characterized by lightheartedness, spontaneity and humor which when fully shared by all participants generates transformations of behaviors, meanings and consequences, purposes, perceptions, and processes in ways that free the participants from fixed, rigid (pathological) patterns and enhances the generation of novel modes of interaction and relationship. Furthermore, from observations of ourselves and work with clients, we all felt that playfulness added to the effectiveness of therapy.

Implications For The Theory, Practice And Training
In Family Therapy

Theory

Central issues to the theories underlying problem solving family therapy agreed upon by the participants in this study are as follows. These issues are identified here because they will be useful for later discussion.

1. Dysfunctional families are doing the best they can. A change in perspective, interactional sequences or myths are needed for a family to operate in a new and hopefully more functional or satisfying way.
2. Talking and insight are not necessarily the best or even helpful parts to a change process.
3. Flexibility is key to moving toward, achieving and maintaining a functional mode. Fixedness perpetuates dysfunctional patterns.
4. Boundaries, hierarchies & alliances are problematical in dysfunctional families.
5. Rules that govern family interactional patterns require alterations as a family moves through various stages of family's life cycle.

Each of these issues is addressed by playfulness. The process of playfulness builds support for participation in therapy. It can unfreeze rigidity of roles, rules, perceptions, myths, hierarchies,

boundaries and model a different way for family members to interact. It can provide an experience in which family members see themselves in a unified cooperative way. This can encourage them to explore and experiment with new behaviors which can strengthen their bonds of interacting.

Family's strengths seem to surface in the playful process. The group of therapists in this study concluded that seeking and identifying a family's strengths was important in order to find effective interventions which can help a family to change. When a family's strengths emerge during playful interactions, it helps the family and the therapist focus on them rather than on the family's limitations. These therapists believe that identifying limitations of a family, which is often the central thrust of non-systemic diagnostic approaches, tends to restrict expectations for the family and confidence in the therapeutic system. Playfulness within a family is seen as a strength in itself which can create a more optimistic prognosis for a family. The pressure of playfulness in families is viewed by the therapists in this study as a form of healthiness which generates other forms of healthiness. Therefore, when assessing families, these therapists suggest that theory and hypotheses regarding a family can be augmented by a recognition of a family's unique forms of playfulness. They also suggest the encouragement of its various manifestations so that it can ignite the family's natural therapeutic capacities.

By including playfulness into the theoretical thinking, hypothesizing and diagnosing of a family, a therapist can more easily break loose from routinized patterns of theory use. It seems to promote

creative application of theory which in turn develops an active and uniquely accurate view of a family's interactions.

Playfulness also contributes to the process of conducting family therapy. Its specific contributions will be presented in the next section entitled Practice of Therapeutic Skills.

Practice of Therapeutic Skills

In the practice of family therapy there are specific therapeutic skills which are learned and associated with various stages of therapy. These stages do not proceed in the linear sequence which are outlined below but rather overlap and interact systemically throughout the course of treatment. The outline of stages of therapy in this section is in this form for the reader's convenience. Specific skills which the group of therapists in this study thought were enhanced by playfulness are woven throughout this presentation.

Formulating an Initial Hypothesis

While this is partly a conceptual skill which might also have been included in the previous theoretical discussion, it is included here because it is the initial step in conducting therapy. An initial hypotheses may be modified several times over the course of therapy, and so its accuracy is not meant to be precise. As therapists try to formulate this hypotheses, they move in and out of different ideas with the family and about the family. There is a strong possibility of being drawn into a family's dysfunctional patterns. This is difficult to

avoid being caught up in yet necessary in order to develop a systemic understanding of a family's problems.

Playfulness enhances our thinking ability to move in and out in a way that allows the therapist to lead rather than to be led. An invitation to be playful when all else has failed for a family affords them the opportunity to explore alternatives available to them. An assessment of their ability to explore and be playful can contribute to the formulation of an initial hypothesis by providing a better picture of a family's potential and capacities to change.

Conducting the First Interview

During the first interview, families are frequently restricted in their interactions. Playfulness is an attitudinal set that can relax tensions and encourage interactions within the family. Usual consequences are set aside as the playful attitudes create new responses.

Playfulness is also a means of drawing children into the therapy. By drawing children into the therapy, this often has the effect of involving other family members. When everyone is involved, the interactional patterns and difficulties are clearer.

Forming Therapeutic Alliances

Two therapeutic skills at this stage enhance the forming of therapeutic alliances. Searching for strengths in a family so that these capacities can be incorporated into the resolving of problems is important.

A second skill associated with developing a therapeutic alliance is the ability to self disclose. Self disclosing relevant information can be particularly helpful when a therapist can expose his own limitations, laugh at himself and allow a family to see predicaments and conflicts are common to us all.

Assessment

Assessing a family requires the gathering of information. In family therapy, gathering information by participating in and encouraging family interactions requires different approaches. When circular questioning ceases to evoke interactional information a playful proposal can evoke a more spontaneous style from a family. As the family becomes more spontaneous, they become increasingly comfortable and they are more likely to display their dysfunctional interaction patterns as the problem set is introduced.

Another closely related skill which is important to the assessment process is probing or exploring for a family's flexibility behaviorally and affectively if it is to occur and continue. Working with playfulness provides for the possibility of increasing the family's limits and ranges of flexibility.

On-Going Treatment

Playfulness helps the therapist redefine the family's problems because it introduces and accepts differentness, suggests alternatives,

provides for flexibility of meaning and encourages creativity. In this way, as a family realizes that things can change, as provided by the playful experience, the group hypothesized that there was an increase in the family's motivation to work at resolving problems.

Relabeling, positive connoting and paradoxical directives all fit into the category of redefining a family's problems and can be enriched by playfulness.

Playfulness helps to avoid too much verbalization. At times, family therapy relies heavily on verbal interactions. It is the belief of this group of therapists that the actual experience of things being different is more important than verbalizing about it. The group proposes that a most significant aspect of playfulness may well be its non verbal aspect. When a contextual understanding is verbally explained, this may not engender change. But being playful becomes the actual experience which may provide a most important difference for the family.

Terminating

In the final stage of therapy, termination with a family includes an effort to punctuate the change that a family has made in a lasting way. This may be attempted paradoxically or more directly. However accomplished an underlying desire is to have helped a family depend on its own therapeutic abilities which provide for the natural healing process to evolve. The group concluded that playfulness addresses this issue as it restores the family's trust in itself to cooperate, solve problems and enjoy itself together.

In the following section, implications that playfulness has regarding the training of family therapists is discussed.

Training

Interviews with and discussions among the six family therapists interviewed for this study revealed that they were already playful in their therapy in some way and to some degree prior to our interviews. By questioning them about playfulness and discussing our ideas, there seemed to be an increase in the identification of their playfulness in therapy, and recognizing its impact. If this interview and group discussion methodology elicited these responses for this study then the implication for training family therapists seems clear. To some extent, trainees are probably already playful but this may not yet be part of their therapeutic repertoire of skills. They may not recognize it in their styles, or they may prohibit themselves from being playful thinking that it is inappropriate.

The group decided that the learning about playfulness could be effectively taught if several approaches were simultaneously and intermittently integrated throughout the training.

The first and perhaps most powerful form of training that is proposed is to model playfulness.

Modeling playfulness can be accomplished in at least two ways. Trainers can be playful in their interaction with trainees. This can be in their general interaction that is not directly related to a specific case (i.e. when greeting them in the lunch room or when discuss-

ing the weather). It can also be more specific to discussion about a family. A playful comment from the trainer about a family can introduce a different understanding but also and more importantly, a different (playful) way of thinking about a family. It proposes a playful attitude to the trainee as it does when it is used with a family.

A more formal, yet just as playful way of modeling playfulness is for the trainer to utilize the Socratic method of teaching. The Socratic style of teaching may be viewed as a form of irony. When a trainee asserts that a family operates in a certain way, the trainer teases for additional assertions by posing questions which arise from the initial assertion that the trainee presents. For example, if the trainee says that junior is staying home from school in order to protect his father, the trainee might pose the question, "If Junior is staying home to protect his father, how will his mother receive protection when she leaves the home?" The idea may seem a bit absurd, but it communicates a systemic thinking about problems, can create a chuckle and allows for the expansion of possibilities and ideas. The trainer does not argue. Whatever the trainer says is accepted and the trainer presents other possibilities through questioning. The flexibility of possibilities increases as new ideas and propositions are added to initial thoughts and explications. In this form of training, the trainee is learning how to think about families systemically and how to loosen his thinking about families through a light form of playfulness. The trainee is learning how to learn.

In addition, the group thought that trainees could be exposed to playfulness through the use of video tapes and two-way mirror supervi-

sion. Video tapes can be used to demonstrate the use of playfulness by other therapists and/or helping a trainee identify his own playful style and forms. Two-way mirror supervision can be implemented for a trainee to observe when another therapist is being playful, how and why (its benefits). The two-way mirror can also be utilized for a trainee, when he is the therapist to punctuate his playful style or as one member of our group felt, to direct him to "go in there and lighten things up." The supervision team can also be playful with the trainee when he comes into the supervision room for consultation. This has the effect of proposing different affect to the trainee around an interactional sequence in which he was just involved. This can allow him alternatives which he in turn can communicate to the family.

While a specific curriculum for training family therapists was not suggested, this author thinks that the format of this study might be utilized as a beginning curriculum. Therefore, the initial step which the curriculum would address would be to talk about playfulness to trainees. The discussions would focus on the categories developed from the interviews conducted by this author. Trainees would be presented with the definition of playfulness as agreed upon in this study and include uses, forms, cautions and how it integrates with the therapeutic process of change. As long as playfulness is presented in the context of the whole process of therapy, its introduction to a trainee could probably come at any time in his training.

Implications For Future Research and Study

Studying playfulness in family therapy requires researchers to abandon rigid definitions of the therapeutic process which expects therapy to follow a set pattern of development. If stages are conceptualized as linear steps which proceed according to a predictable theoretical organization, then it will be difficult for researchers who think this way to approach this subject. Researchers who have a compulsion for tight organization, predictability, exact definitions and methodologies might be unable to adapt themselves to the nature of playfulness. Playfulness is systemic and calls upon all aspects of the individuals in the system. Therefore, to some extent, it will likely always be unpredictable and produce fuzzy definitions and require creative methodologies.

Family therapy seems to me to be a natural area in which to conduct studies of playfulness. Yet, playfulness probably can have an impact on most any human interaction and can be studied in a variety of disciplines. My present idea and areas for future research are as follows:

1. It would be interesting to explore the presence of playfulness in family therapy with a larger sample of family therapists. Although much information was obtained from this sample, I would expect more forms and ideas about playfulness and its impact on therapy to be learned from a larger sample.
2. It would be interesting to conduct a more detailed study of specific ways that the discussion of playfulness with family therapists changed their way of doing therapy.

3. The sample used in this study did not include any substantially culturally different therapists. I would like to explore cultural differences in the forms of playfulness.
4. During this study, the question was raised about male-female differences in the various forms of playfulness. Perhaps, different forms are more closely associated with females or males and this may be a function of our society's socialization process. Therefore, I would like to look more closely at the different forms of playfulness for men and women and question the stereotypes!
5. Several therapists felt that introducing the idea of playfulness too early in the training of a family therapist would tend to confuse the trainee and/or decrease their spontaneity and utilization of playfulness. I would like to study the impact of introducing playfulness, as outlined in the Implications for Training section of this paper, at various stages of training in family therapy.
6. It seems important to study different forms of playfulness in conjunction with various stages of the family life cycle. I would like to see if specific forms of playfulness are unique to specific or most helpful in certain stages and do the specific forms evolve in specific stages of a family's life cycle.
7. While major forms of playfulness seemed readily identifiable, I suspect that many more subtle forms are also active in therapist's styles of conducting family therapy. Yet it's diffi-

cult to recognize these more subtle forms. Perhaps we can learn some of these if we can observe people in playful interactions, video tape those interactions and learn to describe behaviors after breaking them into shorter sequences. We need to recognize these forms so that we are not limited in our understanding of playfulness or in our ability to apply it to the therapeutic process.

8. Several therapists felt that playfulness was an activity which is related to right brain stimulation. They felt that therapists and/or families that could access their right brain activity were likely to be more playful. More research needs to be conducted in this area to explore the interactional impact between playfulness and right brain dominated activity.
9. We hypothesized that playfulness can have a similar impact on the therapeutic process of change in other therapies. It could be interesting to investigate the presence of playfulness with other types of therapy and what differences and similarities exist regarding its impact on the therapeutic process of change.

Conclusion

For the group of six family therapists who participated in this study, it appears that playfulness enters into their work as family therapists more than they originally thought. When playfulness was

brought to their awareness they discovered a higher incidence of its use in their work. This seems to underscore the importance of playfulness in Problem Solving Family Therapy.

The methodology used in this study seemed to be most appropriate for gathering information and observing the impact of this information on the use of playfulness. The direct approach of interviewing each therapist yielded far more information than expected. As a result of simply being asked questions about playfulness, the therapists identified forms of playfulness that they were already using; they began to think about using it more and tended to look for additional ways to use it. They also reported that reading the summary of their interview with the researcher helped them focus on the ideas of playfulness more easily.

Furthermore, it served to facilitate their discussions and use of playfulness at our seminar and in their work setting.

We also found that playfulness had a clearer and stronger impact on the process of therapeutic change than we had come to expect from the literature. These six therapists felt they were already using it to influence change in their therapy prior to our discussions but had not recognized it. Our discussions seemed to increase their awareness of its influence on families with whom they were working and in one case on several colleagues working with one of the therapists.

Exploring, discussing and discovering playfulness also seemed to contribute to the very process of the research in which we were involved. The more playful we became with each other, the more in-

formation was shared. Discoveries seemed to come more easily and the building of a supportive interactive forum developed. Playfulness seems to truly be systemic!

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APPENDIX A

Initial Phone Inquiry

The initial phone contact will basically be an informal conversation with therapists that are presently working as family therapists. The content of the phone conversation will address the issues which are presented in the following format which might be used if the author was unfamiliar with perspective interviewees.

Hello - (family therapist's name). This is Norman Christiansen and I am calling to briefly discuss with you my proposed research for my dissertation and to request your participation in this research project. Do you have about fifteen minutes now or should I call back at a different and more convenient time?

I am interested in the notion of "playfulness" and its usefulness in the family therapeutic context. Very little has been written about playfulness and I think that it could be most helpful in our work as family therapists.

If you are willing, I would like to send you a letter and a brief questionnaire (4 questions) to obtain some preliminary identifying information and to focus your thinking about playfulness.

I would also like to schedule an interview with you that might last as long as two hours in a place and at a time which is mutually convenient for us.

When I have completed this procedure with five other family thera-

pists, I am planning a feedback seminar for the entire group of six therapists. This will also last for approximately 2 hours and I will notify you to set up a convenient time and place.

How does this sound to you?

If you agree to participate in this project, as I have outlined in our conversation, and at any later date decide that you wish to discontinue this process and no longer participate in this project, you are under no obligation to continue.

Do you have any questions to ask me at this time?

Can we schedule a time? - time, place.

If you think of any questions that you would like to ask me prior to our interview, feel free to contact me at 597 Westhampton Road, Northampton, MA 01060, in writing, or by phone at 584-7621.

May I have your mailing address so that I can send you the letter and questionnaire that I mentioned.

Thank you for agreeing to help me out in this research, - I'm looking forward to our interview.

Goodbye.

APPENDIX B

Letter to Research Subjects

Dear (Family Therapist's name):

I would like to thank you again for agreeing to participate in my research project. I believe that your participation will be most helpful to me and perhaps will have a positive impact on your own work as a family therapist.

As I mentioned during our phone conversation, I am interested in playfulness and its usefulness in my family therapy. I would like to explore with you, during our upcoming interview, your ideas and experiences with playfulness and family therapy.

Attached to this letter you will find several questions which I have designed to focus your thinking about playfulness in family therapy. I would like you to please think about these questions, write your responses to them and bring them to our interview on (date, time, place).

I should also like you to understand that you can choose to answer or refuse to answer any questions you wish in the questionnaire, during our interview or during the seminar. You may also discontinue your participation in this project at any time without question.

A report of the results of this study will be made available to you if you should request it.

If you have any questions, my phone number is 584-7621.

Thank you,

Norman Christiansen

APPENDIX B₁

Questions to accompany Letter to Research Subjects

1. When you think about playfulness in family therapy, what comes to mind for you?

(rationale of question - This is a free association question which will allow the therapist the opportunity to put forth whatever his/her initial thoughts may be.)

2. How does playfulness enter into your work as a family therapist now?

(rationale of question - This is a general question that begins to narrow the therapist's thoughts into his/her own work.)

3. Can you give some case examples of your use of playfulness in your work?

(rationale of question - This requests a specific focus from the therapist, asking for his/her unique application of this idea.)

4. What do you make of what playfulness contributes to your work as a family therapist?

(rationale of question - This question allows the therapist to become more general and abstract again, to sit back and view these ideas from a distance.)

APPENDIX C

Interview Format

The research project will be described more thoroughly, answers to questionnaires collected and any additional questions or comments will be answered. The researcher-interviewer will spend time in much the same manner as in any initial interview; joining the therapist and establishing rapport. A set structure will be avoided in order to elicit more spontaneity from the therapist and to allow the interviewer the opportunity to explore relevant areas as they emerge.

Some biographical information will be obtained.

1. Biographical Information:

- A. Name, age, sex, occupational title, education, religion.
- B. Length of time working as a family therapist.
- C. Length of time at present position.

The researcher will present the local concepts that have been developed regarding playfulness. Some discussion will revolve around these notions and then the effort will be to relate them to the therapist's own ideas and to explore the following questions.

- II. A. Do you do anything in your work like I am describing playfulness?
- B. What do you call it?
- C. Can you describe it?

APPENDIX D

Categories

1. Anticipatory Categories:

Diagnostic purposes

Types

Uses

Helpfulness to families (examples)

Helpfulness to therapist (examples)

Cautious about using playfulness

II. Emergent Categories:

To emerge from data collected, coded and analyzed as research project progresses.

APPENDIX E

Seminar Format

The purpose of the seminar is:

- 1) to provide the therapists with a synthesis of the findings collected during the interviews which represents a consensus of their ideas.
- 2) to provide an interactional forum for the sharing and building together of ideas regarding playfulness and their work as family therapists.
- 3) since making playfulness explicit through the questionnaires and interviews, how has this affected their use of it in their work.

Once the data have been collected, coded and analyzed, the actual content of the seminar will become clear and will provide direction and form for its presentation to the group of therapists. It is important at this time to leave this open so that the theory that emerges can construct an appropriate presentation consistent with the idea of a theory as a process.

APPENDIX F

Letter of Appreciation to

Therapists

Dear (therapist's name):

I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your participation in this research paper. I hope you know by now how important your contributions have been. I have learned much from you and through the process of us all working together. I hope that you have enjoyed it also and have been able to apply some of this in a useful way in your work.

Again, many thanks.

Sincerely,

Norman Christianson

